NON-THIRD PARTY CERTIFICATION SCHEMES. THE CASE OF PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEMS IN ECUADOR

MASTER’S THESIS
POLITICAL SCIENCES – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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### Abbreviations

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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Accreditation Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGROCALIDAD</td>
<td>Ecuadorian Agency for the Assessment of Agricultural Quality</td>
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<td>CB</td>
<td>Certification Body</td>
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<td>COPISA</td>
<td>Plurinational and Intercultural Conference on Food Sovereignty</td>
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<td>ICS</td>
<td>Internal Control System</td>
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<td>IFOAM</td>
<td>International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements</td>
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<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Standard Organization</td>
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<td>LORSA</td>
<td>Law on Food Sovereignty</td>
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<td>MAELA</td>
<td>Latin American and Caribbean Agroecological Movement</td>
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<td>MAGAP</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>OAG</td>
<td>Organic Agriculture Group (Brazil)</td>
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<td>PGS</td>
<td>Participatory Guarantee Systems</td>
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<td>RAA</td>
<td>Red Agroecológica del Austro</td>
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<td>TPC</td>
<td>Third Party Certification</td>
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Introduction

Food production, distribution and consumption are increasingly becoming a source of social, environmental, political and economic contest. Divergent visions about what agriculture involves and how it should be carried out constantly heat the debates about food. Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) explore what they call “food regimes”, which are “rule-governed structures of production and consumption of food on a world scale” (110). The authors describe two main trends regarding food regimes: the Neoliberal and Reformist on the one hand, and the Progressive and Radical on the other hand. They also show how these trends approach the social, economic and environmental issues related to their operations. The reformist trend is said to act within the system, advocating for “mild reforms to the regime,” especially through voluntary private governance mechanisms (115). On the other hand, the progressive trend focuses on empowerment of peasants and development of local production through agroecology. Finally, the radical trend focuses on a structural change, and is linked to the principles of food sovereignty (117). It is also important for this analysis to notice the differences these trends have in regard to their approaches to production.

The first group is more or less aligned with the corporate food regime. This regime is characterized by the increasing marketing power of agrifood corporations, the liberalization of agricultural markets, and their industrial approach to production (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011). This productive system is based on monocrops and intensive use of resources. For instance, it is capital-intensive, natural-resources intensive, and input-intensive. Additionally, this scheme has deep social and economic consequences related to land and water grabbing, and dispossession of small-scale owners (Zimmerer 2011). It also contributes to environmental depletion due to the expansion of the agricultural frontier, greenhouse emissions, high dependency on fossil energy, etc. (Altieri and Toledo 2011). Consequently, industrial agriculture is associated with unequal power relations, environmental unsustainability, and energetic inefficiency.

The second group differs in its approach relative to the corporate food regime. It is characterized by local production and trade, small-scale farming and sustainable agriculture. In this context of production, agroecology is especially important for this research. According to Wezel (2009), agroecology may refer to a movement related to sustainable production and rural development, a science rooted in ecology, and a set of farming practices.
Regarding this last point, some of its principles are: recycling nutrients, maintaining good soil conditions, and favoring functional agrobiodiversity (Altieri and Toledo 2011; Wezel 2009). This scheme is much more adapted to small-scale farms, their ecological conditions, and to the social and economic features of their owners. Additionally, it is much more environmentally sustainable since it is ecologically and energetically efficient. Furthermore, this approach has proved to be much more resilient to external stress and is deemed important to address global hunger, and enhance food sovereignty.\(^1\)

As indicated, the reformist trend is said to use private mechanisms of governance to address social, economic and environmental issues; standards and certifications appear chiefly among them. Standards are norms applied to homogenize a series of characteristics of both process and product. Although they were initiated as a European concern for food safety, they have now gained importance as fair trade or organic quality. Standards have grown in number and scope as a consequence of the transition from public to private governance of food (Fuchs et al. 2011a; Hatanaka, Bain and Busch 2005). Certification corresponds to a mechanism intended to demonstrate that a product has met the requirements established in a particular standard (Fuchs et al. 2011a). However, Third Party Certification (TPC) is generally assumed to be the unique mechanism of conformity assessment, despite the fact that the organic movement utilized participatory approaches to certification since the 1970s (Hatanaka et al. 2005; Torremoche 2012). Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) assert that certification may produce less visible changes in the food system than what a radical shift could produce. However, it should not be underrated as an option to stimulate implementation of responsible behavior in the food sector. Moreover, this position does not consider alternative ways of certification.

The preeminence of TPC has obscured alternative mechanisms of certification, which may align with a more progressive, and even radical account of agriculture. Particularly important for the food sector and the global south are Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). PGS arose, among other reasons, as an alternative to TPC especially suited for small-scale agroecological farming. Its bottom-up approach prioritizes participation, empowerment and capacity building, instead of just outcomes. It also opens the door for an

\(^1\) At this moment we have to point out that our focus is on agroecology. Organic agriculture also corresponds to an alternative system of farming. However, it has not been considered in this study since it can also be produced intensively in monocrops. The only difference is that instead of making intensive use of synthetic inputs, they are substituted by organic inputs. Thus, farmers will stay dependent on external acquisitions and to a few products (Altieri and Toledo 2011). However, much of the data used in this research will come from the organic sector, since there is unavailable data on agroecology.
understanding of food production from the perspective of the farmers and their organizational capacity. In addition, it creates appropriate spaces for trading products with higher revenues for small-scale farmers. Those who adhere to PGS’ principles are bound to produce through agroecological methods. Consequently, although using standards and certification, PGS might well be an instrument that comprises a much more progressive approach to food production, trade and consumption.

There are many experiences using PGS around the globe, especially across the Global South, and also in countries where there is extended small-scale farming. In South America there are ongoing experiences e.g. in Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. However, the experience of Brazil with Red Ecovida is a leading example. Macas and Echarry (2009) assert that there are at least nine ongoing experiences with PGS in Ecuador. PGS are important in the Ecuadorian context because of three main reasons. First, due to most of the Units of Agricultural Production (80%) in Ecuador are small-scale farms, the basis of agroecology (Carrion 2012). Second, the relevance of agriculture as a source of employment, and as a supplier of the majority of strategic products for the country, as well as a means for agrobiodiversity conservation (Lacroix et al. 2013; Oyarzun et al. 2013). Finally, PGS are important due to the favorable legal framework of the country. Food sovereignty establishes the prime importance of small-scale farming, traditional agricultural practices, and community-based markets for food self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Consequently, it is of main importance to understand the mechanisms that can build congruence between the legal, political and productive realities in the country. One such mechanism are the PGS. In this vein, we will answer the following research question: how have PGS developed in Ecuador? In doing so, we will explore the legal, political and “on the ground” experiences of agroecology and PGS in Ecuador, as well as the Brazilian experience. For instance, we will show the centrality of Food Sovereignty in the Ecuadorian case, and also the encompassing strategy that links PGS with market and consumer “building” policies, and the flexibility with which PGS were endowed in Brazil.

To address the evolution of PGS in Ecuador, we will divide this work in two main sections. In the first section we will develop our theoretical framework. It will elaborate on private governance, organic standards, and certification schemes. Further, we will explore path dependency and norm diffusion as the theories that will inform our analysis. The second section will be devoted to the empirical analysis of this work. We will elaborate on the evolutionary path of TPC, as well as on the Brazilian and Ecuadorian experiences with PGS.
In the latter case, the legal, political and “on the ground” dimensions of PGS will be subjects of study. The section ends with an analysis of the established research propositions, and secondly, with a brief comparison between the Ecuadorian and Brazilian experiences with PGS. Finally, in the conclusion, we will establish the main findings of this research.
Theoretical Framework

In this first part we will elaborate on the theoretical discussion that will illuminate our examination of PGS. This section will be divided in six parts. First, we will deal with the governance turn in the food sector. Second, some ideas regarding private standards will be posited. Third, certification as an enforcement mechanism will be explained. Fourth, a theoretical discussion on path dependency will be carried out. Fifth, we will rely on theories of norm diffusion in order to shed light on the issue. Finally, we will elaborate on the methodology used in this work.

1.1 Governance Turn

Globalization is said to be the driving force that has allowed the emergence of a “governance turn” in international politics. The progressive vanishing of national boundaries (ruled by national governments) encounters an environment of international anarchy where no apparent central authority exists. In the absence of this authority, non-state actors gain central stage in driving governance processes. This emergent feature of the international system draws attention to the transformation of “the fundamental structures of international politics from an anarchic to a global governance system” (Zürn 2013, 405). Global governance primarily deals with regulatory activities conducted to solve denationalized problems or to provide common goods. This feature has opened the door for a growing involvement of private actors in issues that surpass national domains. Finally “governance presupposes some common interests and goal orientations beyond the nation-state” (408).

This view beyond traditional interstate relations requires understanding on how transnational actors contribute to the governance of problems internationally. Private actors may, for instance, influence the creation of non-binding norms, or in the shaping of policy issues (Abbot 2012; Keck and Sikkink 1999). In this regard, a wide variety of institutions dealing with policy-making, standard setting or information and networking have been created. One of the fields where private governance is gaining relevance is the private regulation of the food sector. Private actors, which formerly were “objects rather than subjects of governance”, are gaining greater significance influencing and shaping the governance of food via a variety of means such as: standard-setting, private codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility (Fuchs et al. 2011a, 335).
Privatization of food governance has been seen from a variety of lenses. Private governance is claimed to ensure the quality and safety of products along with improving the social and environmental conditions of the entire food system (Fuchs et al. 2011). It has also been portrayed as a true interest by part of the firms to harmonize their corporate interests in gaining profit and being responsible for the environmental and societal problems that might arise from their activities. Or, as companies rely on a wider set of constituencies beyond their shareholders, they find themselves in the duty of being accountable to their stakeholders (Crane and Matten 2005). A more critical account highlights, however, the preemptive character of private governance, deployed with the aim of “escaping” from harder and binding state regulation on environmental and social issues, or the pressure exercised on actors lower in the supply chain to comply with certain schemes (Fooks et al. 2013, Busch 2000).

The governance turn has led to the rise of standards and conformity assessment mechanisms. However, this private system is far from being a tool that includes all kinds of actors on it. Although it has been proven to be useful in absolute terms for the food industry, especially if the economic value of e.g. organic certifying is central in the analysis, private governance of food might have deeper social, environmental and political consequences. The exclusion of actors and agricultural practices that do not fit in the general horizon of standards and TPC arise as complexities that need to be dealt with. In this regard, PGS stand out as an alternative specially fitted for small-scale farmers, which deserve to be studied and understood *vis a vis* TPC.

### 1.2 Private Standards

One of the most widespread instruments of private governance of food has to do with standard-setting. Standards are established by states, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or businesses to homogenize a series of characteristics of both processes and products. The former relates to how the product was made, the type or the conditions of production, whether it can be considered organically produced, result of fair trade, etc.; and the latter relates to the qualities of the product, whether it may be considered to be safe, organic, etc. (Fuchs et al. 2011a; Mutersbaugh 2005).

Standards may serve the aim of homogenizing characteristics at various levels along the supply chain. Hatanaka (2005) states that they are meant to be “measures by which products, processes, and producers are judged” (356). Standards were initiated as a European concern
about food safety, but its development was also stimulated alongside the transit from public to private governance of food processes and quality. The resulting private standards were mostly used by private bodies, and they did not have legal responsibility attached in the case of lack of adoption or compliance. Private standards appeared to be “simultaneously a substitute for inadequate public regulation, a response to increasingly stringent regulation, and a means of ‘going beyond’ public regulation to provide credible bases for product differentiation” (Henson and Humphrey 2010, 1629).

Although standards in use today tend to be taken for granted, especially by consumers, it is worth noticing that they have faced a process of harmonization. This process, according to Mutersbaugh (2005), serves to “bring provisions into agreement across national and transnational contexts” creating the space for the globalization and transnational use of standards (2033). The author also indicates some factors linked to harmonization: changes in the language of standards, in the organizational structure, and the consolidation and loss of alternative standards; e.g. organic or fair-trade standards are modified once they are harmonized against International Standard Organization (ISO) norms (2035). In a sense, by certifying products against a particular standard the producer or retailer actually attempts to create trust between him and the consumer through information. Consequently, trust in the compliance with globally recognized standards is a key factor in certification.

There are several reasons that explain the emergence and use of private standards. Compliance with them reflects an increasing interest in product attributes (fair trade, organic, environmentally responsible, etc.). NGOs and civil society activists support adoption of standards through certification as a tool to incorporate ethics in the supply chain, differentiating “alternative” from “conventional” products (Hatanaka et al. 2005). They can also be understood as technical instruments that are used to build trust between distant producers and consumers, as mechanisms of value chain coordination that transmit information to consumers through labeling products; as tools of top-down control, or mechanisms to empower producers (Mutersbaugh 2005; Henson and Humphrey 2010; Auld, Stefan and Cashore 2014).

Furthermore, there are various complementary functions associated with standards. These functions, according to Henson and Humphrey (2010), are the following: standard setting, adoption, implementation, conformity assessment and enforcement. According to the ISO, conformity assessment refers to a mechanism intended for “checking that products, materials, services, systems or people measure up to the specifications of a relevant
There are several ways of assessing against a particular standard, among them we have: certification, testing, and inspection. Ahead in this work we will elaborate particularly on certification.

Auld et al. (2014) examines how private governance works through two different logics or approaches to certification programs: these are the logics of control and empowerment. They argue that current certification programs face increasing pressure to internalize both logics in their frameworks. Both logics focus on different normative values that justify particular courses of action. On the one hand, the logic of control focuses on “ameliorating environmental and social harm resulting from capitalism industrialization and globalization” (4). In order to do so, it embraces a series of formalized prescriptive rules, third party certification, accreditation processes and product tracking. On the other hand, the logic of empowerment focuses on “overcoming marginalization of peripheral actors” (4), and uses a series of participatory mechanisms to conduct evaluations, build knowledge, and empower actors. It aims to redistribute power, and questions both top-down imposed interventions and the value of independent assessment by external actors.

These logics have glitches to be addressed in order to incorporate each-other’s values in their inner logics. The “control then empower” path is aimed primarily in building institutions for enforcing rules, to acquire high compliance with standards. However, its inner nature limits participation to just the actors that have the capacity to afford the costs of TPC and adjust to the practices required, which tend to be large companies with economies of scale; additionally, accreditation against private criteria might act as a trade barrier (Auld et al. 2014, 7). In order to address these power, wealth and regulatory distributional consequences, inclusion, less intensive auditing, lower cost, tailored criteria of standards etc. are thought to be instruments to create empowerment, ameliorate costs and relief regulatory pressure, although the priority is still control. Ahead in this work we will see how TPC is much more linked to this logic.

The “empower then control” path, instead, is confronted with the dilemma of not undermining its participatory character while acquiring more consistency and control. Some of the puzzles this path faces is enhancing its market share without compromising their position among different actors. In other words, it means avoiding ceding power to retailers that might exercise power from the top of the supply chain. Additionally, its participatory

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character is menaced by the certification process which might require controls that do not fit with the producer’s reality and which are conducted against the rules of e.g. ISO (Auld et al. 2014, 11). These wealth, power and regulatory capacity’s divergent patterns conflict the position of each logic in respect to their interest in internalizing challenges posited by their counterparts. PGS, as we will see below, are much more linked to this logic.

1.3 Certification

Certification is gaining importance as a means for assessing firms’ compliance with e.g. environmental, social, productive and administrative standards. This form of private governance is intended, in the organic food sector, as a “market mechanism with market access, price premiums, and reputation as potential incentives” (Marx and Cuypers 2010, 410). As it directly influences on the market, it is considered to play a “market structuring role” (Fuchs et al. 2011). Certification, however, may be carried out in different forms.

Literature generally recognizes three kinds of certification systems: first-party certification (audited by producer), second-party certification (audited by retailer’s experts), and third-party certification which is considered to be a non-state tool for market regulation. This later system works as follows. The producer or retailer asks for certification to a Certification Body (CB). This organism does a documental and administrative inspection, then, a field audit is carried out; in the case of matching with the standards, the certification body extends a certification to the producer and the right to use a label on their products. Certification is usually annually renewed (Dittrich 2010). In doing this, certifiers “appeal to techno-scientific values such as independence, objectivity, and transparency in an attempt to increase trust and legitimacy among their customers and to limit liability” (Hatanaka et al. 2005).

However, TPC systems have not been immune to criticism. They have been blamed for under representing developing countries in the rulemaking process, or for marginalizing small-scale farmers who cannot afford the expenditures of certification, for displacing alternative forms of certification schemes, and for being a disciplinary tool with differential implications for different actors (Dingwerth 2008; Marx and Cuypers 2010; Fuchs et al. 2011b; Mutersbaugh 2005; Hatanaka et al. 2005). Despite this, TPC has become a widespread

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3 A variation of Third-Party certification, but with a higher social content and aimed to certify groups of producers, are the Internal Control Systems (ICS). Although they share characteristics with PGS, they are not the same. ICS generally use external certification “to verify that the internal control of the group is working, rather than inspecting the individual farms”; the certifier usually is a commercial entity, and certification is obtained to export (Källander 2008, 5).

4 Certification Bodies, CBs and certifiers will be used interchangeable along this work.
and accepted mechanism of compliance with standards. It is a mechanism linked to the logic of control, as stated by Auld et al. (2014). Its importance is such that in order to get farmers’ products recognized as organic, to sell to large retailers, or to get access to important organic markets, TPC is mandatory.

The characteristics of small-scale production have opened the door for using alternative certification procedures, with a different structure and dynamic respect of TPC. Participatory Guarantee Systems are gaining attention among small-scale producers in developing countries as a means of learning, assessment, certification, and labeling of production. PGS represents a multi-stakeholder, non-third-party certification scheme, which relies on the principles of participation, transparency, trust, self-determination, and dialogue (Chart of Principles, Latin-American Forum on Participatory Guarantee Systems 2009). PGS represent a certification scheme linked to the logic of empowerment as proposed by Auld et al. (2014).

Attention given to participatory schemes gained momentum in 2004, when the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the Latin American and Caribbean Agroecological Movement (MAELA) gathered in Torres city, Brazil. They promoted the “International Seminar on Alternative Certification” and launched the Chart of Torres (Meirelles and Rebelatto 2008).

Briefly, the system articulates a multi-stakeholder organizational structure that includes producers, consumers, experts, NGOs and municipality representatives in order to conduct farm visits, write reports, and decide on the certification (IFOAM 2015). Characteristic of this scheme is that it commits farmers to a particular kind of production: agroecology, and suits its standards to the socio-cultural features of the producers. According to the IFOAM Global Report (2012) (which includes certified organizations under its umbrella), a large quantity of land is being certified with this system e.g. Australia has over 12 million hectares certified, Argentina 3.8 million and the United States (US) 1.9 million (2).

The producers who use this system are committed to agroecological production, and accordingly, to non-intensive agriculture and enhancing agrobiodiversity. However, the international discussion on PGS posits two main challenges; first, the legal recognition and institutionalization of PGS, and by this the necessity of recognizing certain base-line principles of general applicability to all the PGS; second, the domestic conditions needed to make this scheme flourish in light of the lack of recognition of PGS for exporting markets. This work will explore the experiences with PGS carried out in Brazil and Ecuador.
After a proper understanding of what private governance, standards and certification imply, we draw on the theories that will inform our study. These theoretical bodies will help us to shed light on our main research question through addressing three subsequent sub-questions and establishing the corresponding research propositions. Firstly, we will elaborate on historical institutionalism to analyze TPC schemes. Secondly, theories of norm diffusion will be discussed to analyze the dissemination and adoption of PGS.

1.4 Path dependence

We rely on the literature on historical institutionalism and path dependence to highlight the political implications of expanding the use of TPC as a conformity assessment mechanism. The limits posited on this work do not allow us to carry out a full-fledged account of path dependence on TPC. Instead, we will try to highlight how the developments around certification (as the processes of institutionalization and diffusion) can lead to lock-in TPC as the unique legally backed up method of conformity assessment. This has at least two implications: first, it will show how different regulatory schemes (chiefly in the U.S., the EU and Japan) mandatorily require TPC. Secondly, it explores how producers, especially small-scale, face problems in complying with TPC, and alternative systems are locked-out and left behind as instruments of certification. Understanding this process will help us to answer our first sub-question: To what extent is TPC dominant relative to other forms of certification of agricultural practices?

Historical institutionalism’s main claim states that political choices might have long-standing consequences in the future, and that changes might be quite challenging. This tendency towards inertia and stability over time has been labeled as path dependency. Critics have pointed out the pitfalls of both historical institutionalism in general and path dependency in particular. For instance, the theory has been questioned as lacking a sound account of how change occurs; how ideas affect the path dependency processes; whether there is another mechanism other than increasing returns to explain path dependency; and for disregarding of the role of agency in the processes of change (Greener 2005; Peters, Pierre and King 2005). Rather than trying to address these limitations, we will pay deeper attention to the long-standing and exclusionary effects that certain paths have regarding alternatives.

5 Here we refer to small-scale producers implying their ownership of small-scale family farms / small-scale farmers. These terms can be interchangeable along this work.
Pierson (2000) states that the underlying mechanism of path dependence is the logic of increasing returns. Path dependence analysis considers the centrality of history and aspects such as cost of change, timing of decisions and sequence of events in understanding political processes. The logic of increasing returns refers to the idea that, once a point is reached in a continuum, the cost of retreating might be higher than to keep moving ahead. In this sense, even a mistaken choice can be reinforced through time due to the long-term efficiency it might gain in respect to previous paths not taken. Furthermore, special attention is given to how and when events occur. Formative moments, where decision are made, are highly important, as well as the critical junctures or political spaces where change may occur (Greener 2005; Peters et al. 2005).

Yet, in politics the space for adjusting political options is immensely constrained, when compared to economic choices. Pierson (2000) indicates that economic actors can possibly commit less mistakes in choosing their “path” because, in the end, the market “will choose” the most efficient way of doing the same task. Short-term advantages, which have been produced for particular circumstances, cannot be considered seriously if they exist at the expense of long-term benefits. In politics, however, the effects of erroneous decisions are multiplied various times, and consequently their impact is broader altogether. Political actors make decisions on the behalf of a larger population in a particular period of time, and such political decisions cannot be easily changed. For instance, public institutions, or private ones such as conformity assessment mechanisms, can be much more rigid and exercise their structural pressure over a large array of actors. Therefore, there is only a small area for maneuvering in political options.

As decisions are made, the path chosen in a defined area starts nesting a series of interdependences with possibly long lasting effects. Once institutions are created and their social and organizational links start growing, creating coordination, interdependence and processes of learning around a policy, the possibilities of divergent alternatives to occur in a process that increases over time might be excluded (Pierson 2000). In other words, the more time is left for this nest to grow, the less the chances are to steer towards divergent alternatives or widen the options available.

It is important to notice that disparities in power can have decisive consequences in the paths chosen. Although partnership in a multi-stakeholder environment might assume level playing fields of power among the different actors (Crane and Matten 2005), however it is not always the case. Shareholders, prominent actors, and interested factions might be in a
better position to turn the tide towards particular decisions. As clearly indicated by Pierson (2000): “When certain actors are in a position to impose rules on others, the employment of power may be self-reinforcing. Actors may use political authority to generate changes in the rules of the game (both formal institutions and various public policies) designed to enhance their power” (259). As a result, not just the decisions made to start a defined path, but also the actions conducted to reinforce the chosen path might reflect the power relations in a defined context.

Two characteristics of the logic of increasing returns are of special relevance: inflexibility and potential path inefficiency. According to Arthur (1994) inflexibility correspond to the idea that “The farther into the process we are, the harder it becomes to shift from one path to another”; while potential path inefficiency indicates that “In the long-run, the outcome that becomes locked in may generate lower pay-offs than a forgone alternative would have” (quoted in Pierson 2000, 253). However, according to Greener (2005), increasing returns might exist just at the beginning of the policy implementation. Afterwards “it seems unlikely that anything greater than the preservation of the status quo is possible – a situation more in line with constant than increasing returns” (69). Additionally, Greener (2005) indicates that maintaining the status quo, instead of producing increasing returns, might in some cases generate additional costs and inefficiency.

Exemplary accounts of the persistence, costs and chaining effects of policies have been given in Science and Technology Studies that repeatedly show the outcomes of path dependencies despite poor results in the long run. The added problem to this dynamic is not just the erroneous election of alternatives, but what is more important from our view is the exclusion of options that can be just as good, complementary or much more advantageous than the options taken. To add to our analysis we can indicate that this might apply to agroindustry and agroecology path dependency.

Agroindustry constitutes a competing approach to production in respect to agroecology. Using the terminology of Russel (1999) “genetic engineering” and “agroecological engineering” constitute two different agricultural paradigms (quoted in Arancibia 2013, 80). Due to political pressure steering innovation trajectories (influenced by science & technology policies, lobbying, consumer pressure, etc.) and rivalry for adoption among divergent production processes, a defined technology can be adopted at the expense of higher value options, which maybe do not “fit” in the mainstream productive paradigm (Vanloqueren and Baret 2009; Arancibia 2013). The effects are the lock-in and path dependency of the
dominant “paradigm,” which shapes further developments in science policies, funding, research priorities, and technological applications (Arancibia 2013; Betten et al. 2013; Vanloqueren and Baret 2009). Development of agroecology has been harmed in part due to these path dependencies, even though previous experiences have shown that this approach to production could be better suited, for instance, to assure food sovereignty (Altieri and Toledo 2011).

Based on what has been indicated regarding path dependency, our proposition one is the following: given the widespread legitimation and adoption of TPC, it creates a Path Dependency that excludes divergent approaches to certification.

1.5 Norm diffusion

In order to understand the channels through which alternative forms of certification have opened up a space in Latin America, and particularly in Ecuador, we will rely on the relevance that ideas and norm diffusion has in the process. Norms are considered to be appropriate standards of behavior in a defined context. They are prescriptive as they order something that, in the case of not compliance, might require justification (Finnemore and Sikkink 1999; Cortell and Davis 2000). PGS are increasingly being considered as an alternative form of certification with its own set of principles that make it different regarding the mainstream TPC. Consequently, we can understand PGS as an emerging norm regarding conformity assessment to organic standards and agroecological principles. In order to comprehend how ideas about PGS acquire international resonance, are discussed domestically and develop a process of national institutionalization—understood as the embedding of norms in the state’s regulatory system, we first need to know their likelihood of acceptance as an international norm at the domestic level.

Several theorists on norms and norm diffusion stress a different understanding of the process of norm internalization. A first wave of norm diffusion theorists’ emphasized a cosmopolitan view of ideas and norms, paying special attention to processes and actors at the international level. A second wave were much more interested in exploring a national approach, focusing on the domestic features in a society. They looked for fitting international and domestic norms through a process of congruence-building through framing and grafting. An additional approach, built by Acharya (2004), focuses on the domestic level, albeit stressing the process of what he calls localization. It is important to understand how norm diffusion occurs in order to answer our second and third sub-questions: how ideas regarding
PGS diffused, reaching Latin-America, and particularly Ecuador? And, why were these schemes -PGS- chosen and adopted?

Finnemore and Sikkink (1999) placed special attention on norms at the international level. Norms regarding to e.g. climate change, labor conditions, etc. are spread thanks to its cosmopolitan value and the efforts conducted by norm entrepreneurs. These norm diffusors are actors whose main task is to advocate for the principles they are interested in to gain international resonance. Sometimes these principles meet similar advocacy efforts at the domestic level, which increases the likelihood of adoption. It is important to highlight these actors’ centrality in Finnemore and Sikkink’s three phases norm cycle. In the first stage, when the norm arises, persuading domestic groups for adoption is essential; the second “cascade” stage, where broad acceptance is accomplished, requires a process of socialization that leads to imitation; the third phase of internalization ends up with the adoption of the norm at stake. According to the authors, what drives the second phase in norm adoption is a cosmopolitan sense of being part of the international community and the related state’s recognition and legitimization as being part of the interstate order (902). As can be witnessed, the centrality is put on the international context, emphasizing the role of transnational actors in spreading ideas. Both the domestic impact of international norms, and the role of domestic actors were not considered.

A further step was made by Cortell and Davis (2000) towards gaining understanding on the effects of norms at the domestic level. Their work examines why some international norms are much more prone to have an effect at the domestic level than other norms do. The domestic salience of these norms are reflected on the national discourse, state’s institutions, and state’s policies (70). They emphasize the fact that domestic salience is higher when “[The] international norm or institution accords with national institutions” (71). The domestic discourse provides the context for the understanding and operation of international norms. This cultural match, as is described by Cortell and Davis (2000), provides a framework of consistency between national and international values increasing the likelihood of legitimization of the foreign norm whilst decreases the possibilities of resistance derived from inconsistency with prevailing domestic values. However, the authors conceive this cultural match as a given, this is whether it exists or not. As we will see below, there is a further possibility where actors’ agency is crucial in terms of the acquisition of international norms.
Acharya (2004) describes the idea of localization. Localization comprises a process where local actors actively participate in the construction of foreign ideas, building congruence with previously existing local ideas through a process of flexible adjustment. As Acharya puts it: “[It is] the active construction (thorough discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices” (245). According to the author, ideas travel and produce changes due to three significant reasons. First, due to local initiatives, where indigenous groups deliberately pick up foreign ideas and adapt them to their contexts. Second, through a process of cultural selection, locals choose ideas that complement theirs while being suitable to adaptation and adjustment by part of the borrowers. This can be triggered by the necessity to strengthen, not replace, existing ideas, or because those ideas do not produce a threat in pre-existing social norms and stimulate social or political instability. Third, borrowing foreign ideas might amplify the relevance of local actors and beliefs (245-246).

Acharya (2004) indicates a series of reasons why actors would like to localize foreign ideas, and the likelihood of doing so. A crisis like a war or economic depression; systemic changes like shifts in the rules that govern trade; domestic changes like changes in political regimes; or international events that can steer countries to emulation can be factors that open the door for localization (247). Nonetheless, the likelihood of adoption depends on a series of factors. The most pragmatic account tells us that adopting foreign ideas, which can be modeled to a certain degree, consumes less energy than creating new ones. Other reasons are: the possibility that adopting these foreign norms could enhance the legitimacy and authority of a previously existing institution without altering its social identity. Furthermore, local actors with sufficient prestige can match the discourse of actors at the global level. If locals are directly involved, the process will gain even higher legitimacy (247-249).

A crucial point portrayed by Acharya (2004) is the capacity posited on the agency of actors to conduct these processes of localization. He turns the tide in terms of emphasizing the role of “insider proponents” in regards to “outsiders”, and the change from a transnational moral process to a much more deliberately tailored process, where actors reflexively consider what is better for them. The role of these actors, who can be individuals, epistemic communities, NGOs, etc. is to localize foreign ideas, build congruence (not just by adapting or translating content) with national norms, and legitimize that new order. As Acharya puts it: “while adaptation may be tactical and to some extent forced on the target audience, localization is voluntary and the resulting change likely to be more enduring” (2004, 251). The active role
of the actors creates a much better scenario in terms of their empowering and mobilization role, different from the passiveness with which they have traditionally been endowed.

Considering the abovementioned theory on norm diffusion, we draw on three propositions to make sense of the theoretical discussion in light of our work.

Proposition Two: As TPC, due to its inner characteristics, excludes specially small-farmers, they look for alternatives and develop strategies to cope this block out.

Proposition three: Ideas about PGS spread internationally through a variety of actors (chiefly NGOs), and are actively selected as a scheme much better suited to the realities, thoughts, and practices of small-scale farmers than what TPC are.

Proposition four: PGS are chosen and stimulated due to their help in building congruence between the current agricultural policies in Ecuador, and the actual productive system of the country.

Altogether, the theories mentioned along with the questions posited and the propositions made, will help us to illuminate the empirical study of PGS. Our aim, with the use of propositions for the particular questions posited, is to shed light on the issue and try to make sense of the process carried out and the motives that lead to the adoption of PGS in Ecuador.

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Sample and case selection.

Two cases will be analyzed in this work. One will correspond to a typical case: the settled and successful experience using PGS of the peasant’s network Red Ecovida from Brazil. Our aim is to examine the conditions under which the scheme originated and gained legitimacy as a mechanism to assess compliance with organic standards. This case is particularly important for this analysis in some ways. Firstly, there is plenty information available on secondary sources that will allow us to analyze a particular experience using PGS. Secondly, there are many experiences around the world using this system, but we chose Red Ecovida as a very well-known proximate case in Latin America. Thirdly, PGS have been legally recognized by the Brazilian state. Finally, Red Ecovida, has lead the way in expanding agroecology and institutionalizing PGS in Brazil.

The second case will explore the Ecuadorian experience on the issue, where the use of PGS are in a developing phase. Analyzing this case will help us to understand the formation’s dynamics of participatory schemes and whether the current development of the program
relates to the processes carried out in Brazil. Additionally, it will help us to understand whether the Ecuadorian case has distinctive features in its development. Further, we want to explore the status of PGS in the policy instruments related to agricultural production in the country, and the motives for using this mechanism of certification. We will focus on the *Red Agroecológica del Austro* (RAA) as one of the largest organization of its kind using PGS in the country. This study, consequently, will shed light on the dynamics of formation of PGS and the logic behind its adoption as an alternative to third-party certification.

1.6.2 **Data, population and method.**

1.6.2.1 **Data**

Our analysis will mainly focus on secondary sources, documental analysis, and interviews. Secondary sources will be especially helpful in three ways. Firstly, to understand the conversation regarding food governance, and the mechanism used by private actors to govern the food sector. Secondly, to analyze the experience of Brazil with PGS. Thirdly, to analyze the “on the ground” work conducted by the RAA. In this work we will deal with certification mechanisms intended to assess organic production, paying special attention to TPC and PGS.

Documental analysis will serve as an additional data source to this thesis. Documents are very valuable to understand actors’ positions. Official reports by local, national and international actors will allow us to understand the way they intend to regulate the food sector, especially the mechanisms of certification in use. These documents will also help us to understand the decision-making process, and policy outcomes in relation to the studied phenomenon. Further, analyzing documents produced by a diverse array of actors will help us to understand whether they interact, privilege or dismiss particular forms of assessing certification. A significant part of this analysis will also examine the instruments that define the legal framework of agriculture and its quality assessment in Ecuador.

Semi-structured interviews will additionally be used as a data resource. Our aim with using interviews is to provide a more nuanced picture of the issue. This analytical tool gives us information that is usually not available in printed sources, and which tends to show decision-making processes, and information that might help us to understand the puzzle thoroughly. In this sense, interviews provide important information about the motives that led to specific decisions and the particular “reading” of the issue that the interviewee has. We will conduct four interviews: one with a staff member of the ministry of agriculture,
Ecuador; another one with a member of Colectivo Agroecologico; and two interviews will be held with experts on agricultural issues.

Validity threats.

We find two main problems to be faced regarding validity in a documental analysis; they are interpretation and the very nature of documents. A main threat to the results of our analysis is the biases that researchers may have. Sometimes without noticing researchers might privilege or discard some bits of information that do not support previous assumptions, or that may weaken the desired outcomes of the research. As this may happen, awareness and an equilibrated use of sources may help us to diminish the risk of biased judgments. A competent analysis of documentation requires some degree of interpretation from the context in which it was created and released. Accordingly, possible distortions of this information may be avoided through a thorough and iterative scrutiny of the documentation.

The reliability and robustness of the study may be enhanced through triangulation. Accordingly, this work uses diverse sources and tools of data collection. The use of interviews is very helpful to complement the work done with the documentation and secondary sources. However, some threats regarding the use of interviews are such as: biased questions in the questionnaire; interviewees’ responses conforming to expectations; dissimilar conditions in the interview and lack of consistency among the participants.

Reliability threats.

We can think of three reliability threats that may occur in the research. First, as stated before, the biases of the researchers may induce them to conform to preconceived ideas regarding the information available. For this reason, it is important to register the way in which the research was conducted. Second, as documentation is usually available via internet, it may suddenly disappear from the web. Therefore, it is important to maintain an archive with the documents to be analyzed and be very precise with the address from where they were retrieved. Third, one major problem in interviews may be that the conditions (physical, personal, and psychological) in which they are conducted cannot be easily replicated.
1.6.2.2 Population and unit of analysis

This analysis will be focused on certification schemes, particularly non-third-party certification. This exploration will help us to understand the characteristics of organic certification out of third-party regulatory instruments. Our unit of analysis within non-third-party certification will be Participatory Guarantee Systems.

1.6.2.3 Method

Theory will be used deductively on the basis of previously established research propositions. The theoretical work will be contrasted against the empirical findings taken from the case studies carried out. We will rely fundamentally on historical institutionalism and norm diffusion to shed light on the issues investigated. The analytical stance of this research will be established on the logics of process-tracing and comparative analysis as indicated by George and Benett 2005; consequently, this study will also be diachronic.

On the one hand, process-tracing considers the relevance of history in terms of the development of interactions and decision-making. On the other hand, a comparative analysis can help us to understand whether the compared cases followed or not similar processes of interaction and decision making. As indicated by Gerring (2001) “While the formal analysis may be limited to within-case evidence (cases within the case), most case studies devote some attention to across-case comparisons as well –usually by reference to the secondary literature, or to well-established features of other cases” (215). We will use primary sources, mainly legal instruments and interviews, to trace the development of PGS in Ecuador. Special attention will be given to the “on the ground” experience of RAA. Additionally, and based on secondary sources, we will trace this development of PGS in Brazil, focussing especially in the case of Red Ecovida. Finally, we will compare both experiences in order to extract conclusions.

1.6.3 Theoretical and societal relevance.

This analysis aims to contribute to the understanding of divergent certification schemes and governance of food. Literature has mainly paid attention to national and transnational private mechanisms of food governance, but almost no attention has been given to schemes with a local focus. Third-party certification schemes are mostly developed and spread as global-north private initiatives to be adopted by global-south producers. However, as a divergent mechanism to this kind of certification, small-scale producers who are mostly unable to adopt TPC have acquired and developed participatory approaches to certification.
These types of standards are better suited for the features of small-scale farming. In this regard, analyzing PGS will help to enrich the academic dialogue regarding alternative certification schemes, especially in light of the requirements of small-scale producers in developing countries. Additionally, with our comparative approach, we also aim to define some constitutive characteristics of these schemes. Finally, this study will also have implications in regards to theory, especially for path dependence and norm diffusion.
Analysis of TPC, and Brazilian and Ecuadorian Experiences with PGS

This second part will explore TPC and PGS. This empirical work will assist us in understanding the evolution of TPC, the features PGS possess and the evolution of these schemes in Ecuador. In this way, our results will illuminate our research question: how have PGS developed in Ecuador? In doing so, we will firstly discuss the evolution of TPC and how and when it gained relevance as a mechanism for conformity assessment. This analysis will serve to answer our first sub-question: to what extent is TPC dominant relative to other forms of certification of agricultural practices? Secondly, we will discuss the evolution of PGS in both Brazil and Ecuador, in order to explore their features, compare the cases, get to know possible commonalities, and to understand the ways through which ideas about PGS spread and are adopted. This analysis will aid us in answering our second and third sub-questions: how ideas regarding PGS diffused, reaching Latin America, and particularly Ecuador? And, why were these schemes chosen and adopted? Thirdly, we follow up the section referring to our four propositions. Finally, we devote some analysis to comparing the Brazilian and Ecuadorian cases.

2.1. Third Party Certification and Path Dependence

TPC has widely been adopted as a conformity assessment mechanism for organic products. At the beginning, conformity assessment against organic standards was a result of participatory and relational audit. This is to acknowledge that TPC, which is more focused on the outcomes rather than the processes is, indeed, a novelty in the organic sector. However, since liberalization of food trade expanded, TPC has gained relevance in the field. This system, although useful for large producers and exporting markets, can be exclusionary and even harmful for small-scale producers. In this section we explore the evolution of TPC and how and when it gained relevance. In doing so, we will answer our first sub-question: to what extent is TPC dominant relative to other forms of certification of agricultural practices?

The development of organic standards can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. It started, during the 1920s, with Rudolf Stainer, who was followed by Albert Howard in the 1930s, and Eve Balfour during the 1940s. These pioneers developed “standards” based on their experiences with organic agriculture. The producers who added to such principles, during the 1970s, created their own programs of internal certification in direct relation with the farming process, building confidence between producers and consumers (Torremoche 2012). The main focus, at that time, was centered on the procedures to qualify as organic farmers.
As interest in organic production increased during the 1970s, the sector started to be regulated. In the United States (US), the states of Oregon and California in 1974 regulated organics. They were followed by the European Union in 1991 through EU Regulation 2092/91, which required conformity with the norm EN45011 or ISO 65 -both of which are standards for the operation of certification systems (Torremoche 2012; Dankers and Liu 2003). These frameworks were followed by the Japanese Agriculture Standard in 2000, and the US National Organic Program in 2002. Thus, since 1991 the European Union leads the way towards the use of TPC. As a result, previous participatory systems of internal control and external trust-building were nullified, since compliance with the official norm became the only way to get access to an organic label (Torremoche 2012; Gómez Tovar et al. 2005). In addition, the focus changed from becoming an organic farmer to gaining an organic certification.

Standards alone can stay as declarative norms unless enforcement mechanisms are created. As we have seen, TPC appears as a prevailing mechanism used to accomplish this task. According to Hatanaka et al. (2005) “TPC is emerging as a key institution for enforcing private (and public) standards that is both independent from producers […] and from government” (357). Hatanaka and Busch (2008) attribute the rise of TPC to the shift from government to governance, which allows involvement of non-state actors in the governance of food. TPC corresponds to the logic of control as they are used to assure full compliance with standards (Auld et al. 2014). As they do not overtly include elements that can contribute to technical or managerial improvements, due to their focus on outcomes, they leave little room for incorporating empowering characteristics to certification.

Certification Bodies verify farmers’ compliance with either private or public standards. The outcome of compliance is certification, which can be awarded by certifiers recognized by an Accreditation Board (AB). In the case of organic agriculture, two of the most important standards are the intergovernmental FAO/WHO’s Codex Alimentarius Commission, and the IFOAM’s private standard.6 Additionally, there are several organic frameworks of importance, such as in the case of the European Union’s Eco-Regulation No 834/2007, 889/2008 and 1235/2008; United States’ National Organic Program; and Japan’s Japanese Agricultural Standard (Dankers and Liu 2003). When these frameworks refer to certification,

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6 There are several additional standards developed by firms, states and organizations. We focus on these two which are the most important in terms of adoption and scope.
they refer to forms of TPC. As CBs are usually private enterprises, their capacity to legally certify according to accepted standards is a paid service that responds to demand (Mutersbaugh 2005). Besides, TPC differs from first party (audited by producer), and second party (audited by retailer’s experts) certification in the independent character of the CBs. This alleged independence from both actors is what would legitimize certifiers’ activities. As Hatanaka (2005) states “[TPC] appeals to technoscientific values such as independence, objectivity, and transparency in an attempt to increase trust and legitimacy among their customers and to limit liability” (355).

As suggested, compliance standards have not been solely assessed through TPC. Standards have moved along time to be less relational, this is based on the network of actors related to production, commercialization and consumption, and more notional this is created outside the networks of producers by private committees and are “verified by external inspections” (Mutersbaugh 2005, 2040). This has been, in part, due to a result of processes of harmonization. Harmonization, however, has its ups and its downs. It is important because it diminishes transaction costs, by creating a common framework of international application, instead of many to which farmers need to add one by one. Nevertheless, farmers are minor or even absent actors in the process of building these frameworks (Henson and Humphrey 2010). Yet, non-TPC schemes are no recognized as a means to assess organic production, especially for international trade. Generally only large producers have the possibility of complying with these notional norms.

Standards and TPC seem to be especially advantageous for large retailers in several ways. First, oligopolistic (just few firms) food retailing has pushed them to compete less in terms of prices and more in the quality market (Hatanaka 2005, 358). Staying in this market depends heavily on the production and reproduction of institutions such as private standards, certification schemes or labeling (Henson and Reardon 2005). This set of institutions serves to release the burden from retailers to producers. Second, those who are able to comply with these one-size-fits-all standards gain an advantageous position, while at the same time alternative and more adaptive standards and certification schemes are blocked (Mutersbaugh 2015). The latter applies specifically to small-scale farmers who, unable to certify, will not have access to markets. Third, TPC externalizes problems such as transaction costs and

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8 Cursive added by the author.
liability from the retailer to the supplier and certifier respectively, while internalizes advantages such as quality and safety production, marketing possibilities, and image of commitment with quality and sustainability (Hatanaka 2005).

On the supplier side, certification might allow the farmer to gain access to higher price markets, although it might not be the case. The additional rents produced by using certification to trade in markets with price premium and reputational incentives (Marx and Cuypers 2010) might easily be consumed in meeting the standards, while “leaving retailers with cost-free rents” (Mutersbaugh 2005, 2044). Further, as a larger number of retailers require TPC, it might become less about gaining competitiveness and more about simply remaining in the market. This may be the case for small-scale farmers who face the pressure of changing their production patterns to develop the administrative and technical capacity to meet the standards. As Hatanaka (2005) asserts, TPC is more suited for large producers where certifying does not divert all the rent in meeting the standard’s requirements.

The rationale of TPC has a lot to do with developing countries, which generally are suppliers. A critical account of standards and TPC shows us some of its effects relative to small-scale producers. For instance, private standards displace the role of public regulation, substituting it with standards created mainly by representatives of economically developed countries (Dingwerth 2008). Additionally, the disparities in power along the supply chain give large retailers a privileged position. Moreover, TPC has been criticized for marginalizing small-scale farmers who cannot afford the costs of certification, for displacing alternative forms of certifying, and for being a disciplinary tool (Marx and Cuypers 2010; Fuch, Glaab et al. 2011; Mutersbaugh 2005; Hatanaka et al. 2005; Henson and Humphrey 2010). However, Cecilia Ponce indicates that in some cases, and within initiatives led by NGOs with development purposes, TPC has served indirectly to enhance some processes of technical and managerial learning, helping farmers to grow (I.CN).  

An interesting characteristic of TPC is its embeddedness in what can be named as audit chaining. Hatanaka and Busch (2008) indicate that TPC is provided by CBs, which are usually private organizations. Unless CBs had their own standard, which is uncommon, they would need to be accredited by a public or private AB to convey TPC. For instance the International Organic Agriculture Services accredits CBs against IFOAM’s standard. AB assures that the

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9 Interviews will be coded as follows: the letter (I) will be followed by a period (.) and the code of the interviewee. As in this case: (I.CN) which correspond to Cecilia Ponce from Commercial Networks at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries (MAGAP). To see the whole list of interviewees with their respective code, refer to appendix 1.
CBs under its supervision interpret and use standards in a homogenized way. It means that AB harmonizes standards’ use and application across the industry. Yet, according to Hatanaka and Busch (2008), there are additional rounds of accreditation against different norms. AB and CBs sometimes, as in the case of IFOAM, have to show compliance with norms like ISO 65. Again, to be ISO certified, the AB or CBs might be required to be accredited by a national AB. At the top of this, we can see that a Global Organization of Accreditors (GOA) such as the International Accreditation Forum might oversee an international AB (See Figure 1).

This chaining shows us that the audit is expanding, and official recognition comes attached to it. This occurs with producers who can only gain official recognition of their production through certification. As said, although this system has upsides and downsides, it is still useful internationally due to the separation between producers and consumers. Nonetheless, the problem comes with the displacement of alternative schemes by a single one.

![Figure 1 Audit Chaining (Based on Hatanaka and Busch 2008)](image)

Based on what has been indicated, it is possible to see the path dependence effects of TPC. As revealed from the analysis, certification at the beginning was based on the direct relationship between producers and consumers. As the interest in organics expanded, it started to be regulated by the 1970s. Parallel to this, an expansion and internationalization of food trade occurred. This leads to the establishment of a mechanism for trust-building at the international level. It was in 1991 that European Commission’s Regulation EU 2029/91 required mandatory compliance with TPC to assess organic quality, as TPC is featured as objective and independent. In this way, audits get attached to trading organics. This regulatory norm was adopted by several countries in subsequent years.
One main effect of the mandatory adoption of TPC was that relational schemes in use before the enactment of the regulations were nullified. Additionally, the focus of certification turned out to be less about becoming a good organic producer, and more about gaining certification to get access to markets—usually through retailers. These effects also implied adaptation to the rules needed to gain certification. Thus, TPC also modified the way in which production was carried out. This is especially relevant for small-scale producers who cannot comply with the norms. Yet, as their alternative certification schemes lacked recognition, they were blocked from gaining from certification. However, this scenario opened up space for thinking in alternatives to TPC, and the subsequent effort needed to legitimizing them (See figure 2).

Figure 2 Recognition of TPC and PGS

2.2. Brazilian experience with PGS

This section will explore the legal, political and “on the ground” evolution of PGS in Brazil. The focus will be on the laws that regulate organics and deal with certification. Next, we will explore the debates held around participatory certification. Then, the “on the ground” work of Red Ecovida will be depicted. Analyzing this case will allow us to comprehend the features of the Brazilian process and also to shed light, via comparison, on the process conducted in Ecuador. Thus, this analysis will illuminate our main research question: how has PGS developed in Ecuador?

As we have seen earlier in this work, certification schemes arise in a context of international expansion of food trade, and the development of quality markets. PGS appear in this context as a response to the social, economic, environmental and political challenges that this scenario entails for small-scale farmers. The first path-breaking experience with
participatory certification in Brazil was the result of long term work. It is deemed as a successful attempt to structure a system where certification has central social, economic, environmental and legal consequences. The experience of Red Ecovida, from southern Brazil, is exemplified as the outcome of coordinated efforts to build a PGS and the active involvement on its diffusion and recognition. Both the general path towards recognition of PGS and the work of Red Ecovida are intimately intertwined and should be considered in that manner. As Wezel (2009) acknowledges, the work of Red Ecovida has represented “militant process contributing to a social alternative” (5).

The capacity of small-scale family farming to feed an increasing number of people is being widely documented (Altieri and Toledo 2011). In Latin America around 16 million farmers account for at least 41% of the agricultural output for domestic consumption. In Brazil, around 85% (4.8 million) of the entire number of farmers correspond to family farmers that occupy 40% of the total agricultural land, and produce the majority of products for domestic consumption (Altieri 2011). Although it is true that not all small-scale farms follow agroecological principles (though most commonly they do), it is also true that agroecological practices are profoundly rooted in small-scale farming (I.CA)\(^{11}\). Consequently, family farms whose livelihood are closely linked to agricultural practices are central in the process of transforming the agrarian landscape of developing countries. This occurs through bridging social, economic and environmental divides created by the expansion of socially unfair, energetically inefficient and ecologically non-sustainable agricultural practices.

Nowadays Brazilian agroecology comprises the movement, practice and science dimensions acknowledged by Wezel (2009). According to the author, agroecology originated in Brazil not from a scientific perspective, that occurred in the US or France, but after a recovery of traditional agricultural practices. Agroecology was triggered during the 1970s by the Brazilian agronomist, environmentalist and politician José Lutzenberger.\(^{12}\) It was initiated as an alternative to modern agriculture with the aim of enhancing rural development and to promote family farming. This shows the social roots of agroecology in Brazil. By 1980, the “Advisory body and services to projects in alternative agriculture” was created (AS-PTA), which comprised a network of about ten Brazilian states. This group led the first National

\(^{10}\) From here on we will use the terms participatory certification, credibility certification or PGS as synonymous. However, the term PGS, which was adopted and used systematically since the MAELA-IFOAM meeting in Brazil in 2004, should be properly used from 2004 onwards.

\(^{11}\) Roberto Gortaire, Coordinator of Colectivo Agroecológico (Agroecological Network). For the whole list of interviewees see appendix 1.

Encounter on Agroecology in 2002, whose work influenced national provisions in 2003 as will be seen. (Wezel 2009). Additionally, by 2002 the National Articulation of Agroecology (ANA) was created. It worked directly with social movements and brought together a variety of actors. Further, by 2004 the Brazilian Association of Agroecology (ABA) appeared, approaching agroecology from a scientific perspective. The Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, a state owned enterprise affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture, recognized Agroecology in its scientific dimension (Wezel 2009; Altieri 2011). This social and productive basis, summed up by a sustained advocacy work, led to the institutionalization of PGS in Brazil by 2009.

Participatory certification schemes evolved in Brazil on the basis of already existent agroecological experiences of peasant organizations. The organization of producers to carry out agroecology and to commit to PGS is central, as can be extracted from the case of Red Ecovida. This network presently reaches nearly 170 municipalities in southern Brazil, and about 12,000 peasants are part of the network. Besides, it includes 20 NGOs, ten consumer cooperatives and about 100 ecological markets. However, it started with a lower profile, gathering together small-scale organic farmers, technicians and consumers from southern Brazil states. Its members had been doing agroecology for more than two decades, challenging mainstream agroindustry rooted on the principles of the green revolution (Meirelles and Rebelatto 2008; Altieri 2011). This initial group of supporters of agroecology and PGS was formally established as Red Ecovida in 1998.

The path that led to the future recognition of PGS goes back at least fifteen years before its actual recognition. By 1994 the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture held debates about the regulation of organics, but a series of disagreements halted the process. The dialogue was taken up again by 1997, but it was just in 1999 that the Ministry of Agriculture issues the law: Normative Instruction (NI) 07/99 determining that, to be recognized as organic, products needed a valid certification. There was agreement within the organic movement on the necessity of promoting and regulating organics, the disagreement was regarding the voluntary or mandatory character of certification. Some supported mandatory certification through audits and inspections. Other supported voluntary certification through participatory mechanisms. The law, though, remained quite flexible, adapting its applicability to both local

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and regional contexts. This allowed the parallel development of both audit and credibility based certification (Meirelles and Rebelatto 2008; Meirelles 2008; 2010; Fonseca et al. 2008).

Part of the NI 07/99 was the creation of a National and State Committee for Organic Production. The aim of this body was to implement the NI, mainly controlling and monitoring, through accrediting and regularizing CBs working in Brazil, and by promoting organic agriculture. In 2002, the National Committee issued NI 06/02 which had to do with the accreditation criteria. This law was criticized as it was confusing and too stringent, in a way that just a couple of CBs could comply with it, and also because it excluded credibility based certification. The flexibility presented in the previous law was completely lost in the new one. This backward step opened the door for further discussion on the regulation of organic production (Meirelles and Rebelatto 2008, Meirelles 2008).

A second large debate took place during the 2002 National Encounter on Agroecology held in Rio de Janeiro. There was concern on the exclusionary approach embedded in the latter law, especially in regards to small-scale producers. The meeting ended up creating the Organic Agriculture Group (OAG) with the purpose of stopping the implementation of the previous law, opening up the debate, reaching consensus within the organic sector, discussing and building the capacity on participatory certification, and writing up the new law. The Ministry of Agriculture invited the OAG to organize the work in several groups. One of them was the PGS group. The OAG received financial support by the government to cover the cost of following up the systematization of ongoing PGS upon which the proposal was going to be based (Meirelles 2010). There were two main arguments employed to include PGS at the legal framework: the need to create a certification scheme suited for the social, cultural, economic and environmental realities of small-scale farmers, and to avoid making certification a barrier to market development of these groups. The outcome was Law 10.831 of December 2003, and the practical recognition of PGS was established by NI 19/09 in May 28, 2009 (Meirelles and Rebelatto 2008; Meirelles 2010; Fonseca et al. 2008).

The new law accepts and rules over three forms of certification related to specific productive and spatial features. The organism of control of certification is the Brazilian System for Evaluating Organic Conformity and it validates the following systems: third-party certification (TPC), participatory assessment bodies (PAB), and social control organizations (SCO). The latter two use participatory approaches. TPC is intended for exporting markets, while PAB uses PGS for non-direct sales, and SCO for direct sales. Both TPC and PAB receive the same seal for complying with organic regulations, while SCO does not receive
any seal but has to register its activities under the Ministry of Agriculture (Mendoza and Marques 2014; Meirelles 2010).

The broad participation of grassroots associations and networks of producers consistently work towards gaining legitimacy and materialization of their advocacy. Red Ecovida was pioneering the process both through having a long standing commitment with agroecological practices, and also as a social force pushing for change. Nowadays Red Ecovida sells products through different means such as direct sales, open markets, public sales or exporting (in this case, much of this is certified by an additional CB) (Meirelles and Rebelatto 2008). It also works in connecting farmers with consumers, and building fair trade markets as part of the strategy to rebuild fair social relationships of interchange. In doing so, the network encompasses several activities such as norm building, capacity building, fair and solidary trade, political advocacy, information and communication, and certification itself. However, according to Meirelles and Rebelatto (2008), some of the challenges the network faces is adapting their norms to a wider array of ecosystems, and supporting the learning process leading towards agroecological transition.

It is important to mention some moments observed in the process held in Brazil. First, as the analysis shows, the legal framework of PGS draws on the systematization of ongoing experiences with PGS. Second, the process required multiple phases of dialogue, especially to incorporate actors, and to create a much more nuanced norm. This is shown in the two rounds of dialogue held on organic regulation. As Fonseca et al. (2011) say: “the implementation of a control system, without prior discussion with the movements, is likely to provoke tensions.” Also, the dialogue and subsequent consolidation of PGS occurred during the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who carried out an agrarian reform, and the labor party president Luis Ignacio “Lula” da Silva. In the case of Lula, as with many governments of Latin America since the beginning of the XXI century, political parties come to power with support of social movements. Accordingly, spaces for convergence, political participation and advocacy are created, especially at the beginning of their periods in office (Iglesias 2011). However, a variance exist in regards to the actual effect of these dialogical spaces, the agreements reached, and the continuity of the participation.

Third, inclusiveness has its practical expression in flexibility. PGS serve to bring together constituencies that have traditionally been set apart. It was of main importance to maintain the adaptive capacity of the entire law, since too stringent, administratively confusing and complicate norms might discourage adoption of PGS. Fourth, instead of an assessment tool,
PGS might be considered in light of its sustainable development dimension. As the Brazilian experience suggests “a strong civil society has acted to draw legislation beyond a simple matter of trade and business standards and rather far into a (rural) development mechanism seeing controlled organic agriculture and fair trade as core/integrated part of a sustainable (consumption, production) future of both urban and rural peoples” (Fonseca et al. 2008). Fifth, the timing is important to avoid institutionalizing under inconvenient conditions and facing pressure to adopt non-plural and rigid regulations. Sixth, academic research of existing experiences, and the work being done to receive supportive advocacy are central in the process. Seventh, the institutionalization of PGS in Brazil was the result of a process lasting 15 years (1994-2009), but in terms of the capacity building the process buries its roots in the early 1970s (See Figure 3).

It is possible to extract some features out of the long run experience of Brazil and Red Ecovida. With the risk of oversimplification, we think the process could be summarized in four phases, the three first ones overlap continuously. First is organizational. It refers to the already working networks of peasants that establish initial experiences with agroecology and PGS. These organizations are fundamental as they build capacity on agroecology and its participatory assessment. Second is participative. It refers to the importance of opening up fluent dialogue within the organic movement, as shown in the two rounds of discussion conducted to regulate organics, and the creation of the OAG. Third is advocacy. This includes the work done to include the process in the legal framework based on the already systematized “on the ground” experiences. Fourth is consolidation. It refers to the inclusion of PGS within the law as an instrument of promotion, instead of control. The consolidation, though, occurred during the government of a progressive regime. This four-phase scheme will be used to compare this experience with the Ecuadorian one. Additionally, in the same section we will shed light on the relationship among the phases aforementioned, and the results obtained from the analysis of our research propositions.
Figure 3 Development of PGS in Brazil
2.3. Ecuadorian Experience with PGS

According to Lacroix, Chauveau and Taipe (2013), small farmers are the main suppliers of strategic products for the national markets. They produce 42% of milk, 49% of rice, 64% of potatoes, 71% of soft maize, 71% of pork meat, 73% of eggs, 77% of carrots and 91% of onions for domestic consumption. Additionally, they export products with the quantities of 14% of bananas, 36% of café and 37% of cacao (65). Thus, small farms in the Andean region play a major role in “conserving agrobiodiversity and supplying biodiverse food to the urban population in Ecuador” (Oyarzun et al. 2013, 531). According to Carrion (2012) agroindustrial production is growing at the expenses of peasant farming. Despite the evident importance of small farms, they are considered as economically inefficient, receiving less support for productive aims and more as social assistance (Carrion 2013).

Although Ecuador is not a large producer of organics, contributing only 1% of the total in Latin America (Heifer Ecuador 2014), what is important is that there is small-scale family farming. This kind of farming represents 80% of the Units of Agricultural Production in Ecuador, including approximately 712,000 peasants that occupy only 19% of the land (Heifer Ecuador 2014, 18; Carrion 2012, 80). Furthermore, in more than 57% of all the cantons in the highlands and coast regions clean agriculture (organic and agroecological) is carried out. Besides, agroecology without certification is practiced in 17 out of 24 provinces in the country (Heifer Ecuador 2014, 61). From this context, it is clear that agriculture requires much more than changes on the surface, needing interventions in land tenure, water distribution, resource allocation, etc. As we will see below, by law, the state stimulates non-industrial forms of agricultural production, but they need to be built altogether with the necessary public policies and mechanisms to articulate laws and actual practices. In this scenario PGS appear as a mechanism that can bridge this gap.

This section provides the necessary elements to answer our main research question: how has PGS developed in Ecuador? To examine this process we will divide the analysis into three subsections. Firstly, the analysis will focus on Ecuador’s legal framework. This will enable us to understand how the legal instruments in the country are built up in relation to food

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14 Popular markets in Ecuador are being displaced by supermarkets. Thanks to the increasing influence of agroindustries between 75% and 80% of the middle and high income people purchase food in supermarkets. Yet, this also implies that a percentage of these segments, and a presumably large part of low income groups will get their food from popular markets. Most of the production of small farmers is sold via intermediaries, or through arrangements with supermarkets; frequently these forms of commercialization lack social equity and justice (Lacroix, Chauveau and Taipe 2013, 66). Accordingly, as will be shown below, PGS may serve to correct these negative features through trust-building.
sovereignty, small-scale family farming, regulation of organics and PGS. Secondly, based on the information provided by our interviewees, this subsection explores the work conducted up to now in regards to the development of PGS, the interviewees’ understanding of PGS, and their thoughts on the implication of institutionalizing PGS. Finally, we examine the experience of Red Agroecological del Austro (RAA) with agroecology and PGS. As showed earlier in this work, ongoing experiences, and their systematization, are of core importance for the development of PGS. This analysis will also illuminate on our sub questions two and three. They are: how ideas regarding PGS diffused, reaching Latin America, and particularly Ecuador? And, why were these schemes -PGS- chosen and adopted.

2.3.1. Agroecology and PGS according to the Law.

This subsection deals with the Ecuadorian legal framework regarding agricultural production and its assessment, focusing on small-scale family farms. Special attention will be given to the present laws, but it will also consider some law proposal that serve to understand the entire process. The organic sector was to be regulated in Ecuador in 2003. It was enacted as Executive Decree 3609 establishing the General Normative for the Promotion and Regulation of Organic Production. The subsequent applicability charter: Ministerial Provision 177 dealt with the Regulatory Framework for the Normative on Organic Agriculture and Livestock Production in Ecuador. This framework established agroecological, ecological and biological products as synonyms with organic. The consequences of this treatment were that agroecological production became the subject of regulation and required certification to be sold as organic. According to I.CA, a joint effort was needed by part of the agroecological movement to pull agroecology out as synonymous with organic. The result was Ministerial Provision 302, enacted in 2006, which amended provision 177 and pulled agroecology out as a synonym of organic.

Small-scale agriculture received leverage with the Constitution of 2008 and the Law on Food Sovereignty of 2009 (LORSA); both legal instruments were enacted during the first years in office of President Rafael Correa. The constitution, in its Art. 281, recognizes Food Sovereignty as a national strategic objective (Art. 281c), promoting ecological and organic technologies in agriculture (Art. 281c), promoting

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15 The agroecological movement is formed by a wide array of constituencies. Some salient members are: Colectivo Agroecológico, Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología, Red de Guardianes de las Semillas, etc. When we refer to the agroecological movement, except when specified, we refer to this wider group.
16 Short time after Correa comes into power, a general assembly to reform the constitution was convened. It created the political opportunity for actors to embed their demands at the highest legal level.
agrobiodiversity conservation and traditional knowledge linked to it, and the use, interchange and conservation of seeds (Art. 281f). Further, the state compromises to strengthen networks of producers, consumers and traders with the aim of encouraging equity between rural and urban territories (Art. 281j). In this vein, the whole approach of food sovereignty favoring small-scale farming gained leverage and from then on efforts toward consolidating agroecology and spreading PGS were framed according to this legal body.

With the LORSA the state turned the tide towards sustainable agriculture. Briefly, the law deals with aspects such as the promotion of domestic consumption of agroecological and organic products (Art. 3d). It also restates the duty of the state with agrobiodiversity conservation (Art. 7-8). It explicitly prohibits “any form of appropriation of collective and ancestral knowledge associated with national biodiversity” (Art. 9).17 In addition, the state compromises to promote transitions towards sustainable and agroecological models of production (Art. 13, 14). Furthermore, and of core importance in terms of the whole scope of the law, the state will establish the necessary mechanisms of trade, building markets for direct interchange between producers and consumers. It also derives to the municipalities the duty of providing the infrastructure for small-scale producers to trade within the framework of a “new relationship of social and solidary economy” (Art. 21).18 Yet, it should be noticed that the indigenous movement and left-wing groups were influential during the making of the constitution.19

Both legal bodies served to frame the demands on agricultural issues. In 2008, by Executive Decree 1449, the former Ecuadorian Service for Agricultural and Livestock Salubrity was transformed into the Ecuadorian Agency for the Assessment of Agricultural Quality (AGROCALIDAD). This agency is in charge of evaluating the safety and quality of food and organizing the mechanism of certification. In 2011 it became part of the Ministry on Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries (MAGAP). In 2013, through Resolution 99, it was issued the task of writing up the Instructions Manual of the General

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17 Translated from Spanish by the author: “Se prohíbe cualquier forma de apropiación del conocimiento colectivo y saberes ancestrales asociados a la biodiversidad nacional” (Art. 9).
18 Translated from Spanish by the author: “como una nueva relación de economía social y solidaria” (Art. 21).
19 According to an important work conducted by Peña (2013): “the process was decentralized and participatory whereby social movement organizations had access to influential legislative allies and political alignments, allowing them to directly negotiate the principles of the food sovereignty regime of the constitution” (16). In the making of the constitution a working table on Social Equity and Inclusion was in charge of drafting the legal body on Food Sovereignty, its president was Pedro de la Cruz a leader of one of the largest indigenous organizations in Ecuador: FENOCIN, who at the same time was a delegate of Alianza País the government’s political movement. After the making of the Constitution and LORSA the Plurinational and Intercultural Conference on Food Sovereignty (COPISA), an autonomous advisor organization in charge of creating supplementary laws was established.
Normative for the Promotion and Regulation of Organic, Ecological and Biological Agriculture in Ecuador, which was enacted in 2013 by Executive Decree 1449. In the Instructions Manual, Art. 4 establishes the scope of the law in terms of production, certification and labeling, and explicitly mentions at the very end that: “For the case of Agroecological Systems and their Participatory Guarantee Systems for trading in local markets, the Ecuadorian Agency for the Assessment of Agricultural Quality – AGROCALIDAD- will develop, through a participatory approach, a specific instruction manual to be applied in the mentioned systems of production” (Art. 4). Thus, it recognizes the necessity for an exclusive legal body for PGS.

There are three legal bodies of relevance that provide further articulation to the enhancement of small-scale family farming and agroecology. The first one has been passed, while the other two are proposals. The first one was the 2011 Law on Solidary and Popular Economy and Solidary and Popular Finances. This law has tried to include social responsibility in the economy, through e.g. fair trade and ethical and responsible consumerism (Art. 4). It focused on the activities originating from individual or associative processes of production, interchange and trading of goods and services under the principles of solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity. This framework supports economic integration, education and training, and endows municipalities with the duty of allocating and developing markets for small-scale producers. In this regard, it encourages the associative, empowering and bridge-building features of PGS.

The second one is a COPISA’s 2012 proposal for a law on Agrobiodiversity, Seeds and Promotion of Agroecology. Broadly, the proposal suggested preserving native seeds and putting them in public (peasants’) hands, avoiding its privatization. It is aimed at promoting agroecology as a mechanism for agrobiodiversity conservation. Also, it established that PGS will serve to guarantee the quality of seeds (Art. 15); and added that “The estate, through the agency in charge of agriculture, will acknowledge and promote Participatory Guarantee Systems for agroecological production. These systems will have complete validity and autonomous functioning in conformity to the normative created for such purpose” (Art. 22). Here, again, it is clear the focus on the autonomy and grassroots basis of PGS.

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Translated from spanish by the author: “Para el caso de Sistemas Agroecológicos y sus sistemas Participativos de Garantía destinada a la venta en mercados locales, La Agencia Ecuatoriana de Aseguramiento de la Calidad del Agro – AGROCALIDAD, elaborará de manera participativa un Instructivo específico aplicable para dichos sistemas de producción” (Art. 4).
The third one is a COPISA’s 2013 proposal for a law on Responsible Consumerism for Food Sovereignty. It is built on the abovementioned law on Solidary and Popular Economy, and proposes to “build a consumer as a social and political actor” (p.4), it goes further stating in its foreword that:

It is not just about improving collective beliefs and consumer habits, but about promoting redistributive processes that stimulate solidary and social economy.
It is also about contributing to the strengthening of sectorial policies that stimulate peasant family farms practicing agroecology, and artisanal fishery and gathering (2).

This proposal intends to stimulate consumer consistency with the principles of food sovereignty. It wants to fuel small-scale family farm production; to change habits of consumers; to enhance institutional and technological capacity; to regulate labeling; and to develop policies to invest in quality controls of food. As asserted by Stephen Sherwood, customers through consumerism sponsor a defined form of production, in this case agroecological as opposed to industrial (I.UW). The proposal explicitly mentions the promotion role of AGROCALIDAD in regards to the PGS and the independent character of these schemes. Yet, it is worth mentioning the presence of offices devoted to build or stimulate markets for small-scale farmers and PGS initiatives in the MAGAP through the Coordination Office for Commercial Networks, part of the vice-ministry on Rural Development (I.UW; I.CA) (See figure 5).

2.3.2. Agroecology and PGS as informed by the interviewees.

This subsection examines agroecology and PGS as reported by our interviewees. It intends to gain deeper understanding about the issue through the lenses of experts, academics, advocates and functionaries. Thus, we will focus on our interviewees’ conceptualizations of PGS, their thoughts on the issue of institutionalizing PBS, and their interpretation of the whole process. Accordingly, we will explore the social, economic, development and political dimensions of PGS.

The gap between the statements found in the law, and the actual policies and mechanism required to stimulate small-scale farming and agroecological production, is still in-waiting to

21 Translated from spanish by the author: “No solo se trata de mejorar constantemente las creencias y los hábitos alimentarios colectivos, sino de promover procesos redistributivos, estímulos al modelo económico social solidario, incluso el fortalecimiento de las políticas sectoriales que promuevan a agricultura familiar campesina de matriz agroecológica, la pesca y recolección artesanal” (2).
22 Stephen Sherwood is Lecturer and Research Fellow at the University of Wageningen, the Netherlands. For the whole list of interviewees see appendix 1.
be bridged. PGS are meant as a mechanism to support this task through promoting agroecology and building confidence between producers and consumers. Yet, despite this function, they need to be accompanied by policies that link them to markets and trigger responsible consumerism. In this way, the door is opened for mutual benefits of producers and consumers who jointly gain from this strategy that encompasses environmental responsibility, quality guarantees and economic profitability.

Agroindustry is widely used and supported at the expense of small-scale agroecology. The expanding importance of agroindustry leaves behind the agroecological processes that tend to be carried out by small-scale farmers. As reported by I.CA:

Despite constitutional and legal advances, they are quite far from becoming daily political practices. Finally, agrarian policies follow more or less the traditional trend that focuses on large-scale capital enterprises, enhancing agroindustrial chains. The idea held about family-farms is to make them providers of large-capital enterprises, and there is no real policy that triggers food sovereignty or autonomous and diversified family-farming. This is the paradox we face. On one side, there are meaningful demands by part of social movements and peasant movements to build food sovereignty [...] but there is no adequate response on the side of public policies.23

An important response to this scenario comes from the agroecological movement that struggles to build up agroecology as a different approach to understanding and practicing agriculture. It is important to note the work held by the agroecological movement to pull agroecology out of Ministerial Provision 177, as a synonymous of organic (I.CA; I.CN). Additionally, the agroecological movement in Ecuador has worked consistently to raise awareness of this issue, and takes part in the debates held by AGROCALIDAD aimed to build up the regulatory framework that will rule PGS. Though, according to I.CN, there is still a lack of internal cohesion within the movement. Overcoming this division will help to broaden the debate as this occurred with the OAG in Brazil.

In Ecuador agroecology has been practiced since the 1980s. However, to make agroecology attractive to producers, and to scale up adoption of it, some supportive measures need to be implemented e.g. access to markets. That is why foundations and NGOs are used

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23 Translated from Spanish by the author: “a pesar de esos avances constitucionales y legales, está muy lejos de convertirse en políticas publicas cotidianas. En definitiva, la política agraria sigue más o menos la misma orientación tradicional o confesional de orientarse al gran capital, de estimular estas cadenas agroindustriales. La visión que hay sobre la agricultura familiar es más bien estimular que se convierta en proveedor del gran capital, y no hay realmente una política que estimule la soberanía alimentaria o una agricultura familiar más autónoma o diversificada. Esa es entonces la paradoja que tenemos. Por un lado hay una demanda importante de los movimientos sociales, de los movimientos campesinos de construir la soberanía alimentaria [...] pero sin embargo no se encuentra una respuesta adecuada en la política pública” (I.CA).
to support farmers in certifying their products for exporting (I.CN). In 2004, after a discussion among CBs and agroecological producers, the former casted doubt on the transparency of some farmers’ Internal Control Systems, accusing them as being judge and jury. This opened the door for thinking on PGS. As I.CN puts it:

With a super critical debate held around 2004, where third-party certifiers told them that this [the ICS] cannot be trustworthy [...] because they become judge and jury - and in some sense they were right [...] That made them [the farmers] lose credibility. [Then], between 2004 and 2007, it is PROBIO24 who conducts some interchange of experiences with Brazil [...] with the experience of Ecovida.25

PGS arise in this way as a step further in trust-building between producers and consumers. Both, I.CN and I.CA point out to the Brazilian and Costa Rican experiences as being informative for the Ecuadorian one. However, the process is also reported as being one of mutual learning, and not a blind import of PGS to the local context. Although PGS are not necessarily a peasant proposal, it certainly correspond to the joint work of social organizations that have built on the traditional peasant demands for land and water (I.CN).

In this vein, NGOs such as PROBIO, HEIFNER, VECO, SENDAS, SEDIR, etc. have worked largely in promoting agroecology and supporting peasants’ organizations. Additionally, local organizations, such as PROBIO and RAA, enhanced their already existing agroecological practices, strengthened their ideas and adapted some aspects of the Brazilian experience with PGS to the national context. Notwithstanding, as indicated by Cecilia Ponce: “there was learning, but the Ecuadorian model is very local” (I.CN).26

PGS have an important sustainable development dimension, they cannot be merely considered to be a certification scheme. They are built together with developments in production, consumption and market building. Their local character and empowering logic make them mechanisms of promotion and technical and administrative accompaniment, besides being a means to conduct agroecological transitions. They are a way “of building up the sector” (I.KIP), through functioning as a road map (I.CA; I.CN). In addition, they are considered to be a tool for territorial development rooted in agroecology, and based on

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24 The Ecuadorian Corporation of Biological Producers: PROBIO, is an organization that maintains their own system of PGS.
25 Translated from spanish by the author: “con un debate además super super crítico, que se dio aquí más o menos en el 2004, donde las certificadoras de terceros les emplazan y les dicen esto no puede ser creíble [...] porque ustedes son juez y parte, y de alguna manera tienen razón [...] y eso perdía cierto peso [...] Entonces entre 2004 y 2007 es precisamente PROBIO quien desarrolla unos intercambios de experiencias a Brasil [...] con la experiencia de Ecovida” (I.CN).
26 Translated from spanish by the author: “hubo aprendizajes, pero el modelo ecuatoriano es muy local” (I.CN).
organizations with access to markets. PGS are deemed important food sovereignty congruence-building (I.CN; I.UW). As indicated by I.UW:

PGS are an answer, a proposal to internalize certain externalities [unfair labor, unfair prices, ecological depletion, management of public resources]. It allows the consumer to know how the logic of production works and in this way endow them a role, a larger influence that just paying for weight. [Furthermore, they serve] as a mechanism to correct one of the structural problems of agricultural modernization: the separation of the processes of production and consumption.

In this way, their main purposes are to promote agroecology and shorten the distance between producer and consumer through confidence. This helps to build up relationships, and halt the violence created by the separation as it reflects on e.g. unfair prices. Complementary, it is necessary to build the social space for fair interchange (markets) and gain supporters (customers) who pay. In this way, through an encompassing strategy, the whole process is reinforced (See Figure 4). Yet, it should be noticed that PGS are a tool to be used, not an end itself. As I.CN puts it:

SPG were never an end, the proposal was not getting to PGS to build development but to agroecology and alternative markets. They serve to provide an element of confidence and shorten the distance between the producer and the consumer. PGS do not represent the social process, the real representatives are agroecology, sustainable development and responsible consumerism.

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27 Translated from spanish by the author: “SGP es una respuesta, una propuesta para internalizar ciertas externalidades. En este caso que el consumidor sepa cómo está producida la lógica y que tenga un rol, una influencia mayor que solamente pagar solo por peso” [Además] “SPG como un mecanismo de corregir uno de los problemas estructurales de la modernización agrícola de separar los procesos de producción y consumo” (I.UW).

28 Cursive added by the author.

29 Translated from spanish by the author: “EL SPG nunca fue el fin, la propuesta no fue ir hacia el SPG para construir desarrollo sino la agroecología y los mercados alternativos. Sirve para dar un elemento de confianza y acercar al productor y al consumidor. El SPG no representa el proceso social, el que si representa es la agroecología, el desarrollo sustentable, el consumo responsable” (I.CN).
Yet, this tool can be highly beneficial for those who use it. According to I.CA and I.CN, organizations of producers want to provide a guarantee to their customers, and initially made use of ICS. To sum up, the challenges on the legitimacy of ICS and the restrictive access and inaccuracy of TPC in respect to agroecology brought about the necessity to build a model of certification related to the logic of agroecology, affordable and adapted to peasants’ realities (I.CN). This resulted in exploring PGS as a possible answer. Yet, PGS bring more advantages to farmers such as the sense of being part of the organization, having technical and administrative assistance, gaining recognition as agroecological producers, and have access to markets (I.CA; I.CN, I.KIT). As indicated by Rianhon Pyburn, the agroecological credential is a way for the farmer to say to the consumer “Hey! Look, this is what I’ve done” (I.KIT).30

As PGS expand across Ecuador, they now face the challenge of meeting the state. According to I.KIT, institutionalizing PGS brings two main challenges. First, they may become rigid and less fluid; second, “with institutionalization, it also took a lot of the decisions, a lot of the movement part of organic out of the hands of the farmers. So then it became policy makers, predominantly informed by businesses and so on, who are making decisions about farmers’ production methods and so on” (I.KIT). Flexibility is important since the diversity of agroecological landscapes requires PGS to adapt to them. Additionally, politicizing the process extensively could lead to excessive control, bureaucratizing it and making it difficult for farmers to follow the law. This might discourage adoption, and take the process out of the hands of the grassroots (I.CA; I.CN; I.SW).

30 Rhiannon Pyburn is Senior Advisor at the Royal Tropical Institute, the Netherlands. For the whole list of interviewees see appendix 1.
Consequently, there is fear for the state assuming a controlling role over PGS and, through it, over agroecology without having supported the sector before (I.CA). For I.CA promotion should come first, and regulation second. I.CN states that PGS can serve to promote agroecology and its role is not controlling but scaling up agroecology. In this scenario, the role of AGROCALIDAD should be to register and accredit organizations to use PGS, and oversee that farms actually have an administrative structure that allows them to follow up the process. Yet, it should not control either the farms or the process (I.CA; I.CN). The responsibility, then, falls directly on the organizations and farmers who, while remaining independent, assume the burden of being accountable for the process (I.UW). In this sense, the regulation over PGS should be less a punitive instrument, and more of a promotion device.

Yet, there are also advantages that come together with institutionalization. Especially important are three points. First, it gives legitimacy to the system and makes it trustworthy (I.KIT). Second, it represents an advantage for the farmers as they can assure the quality of their product with the backup of a government agency (I.CA; I.KIT). Third, a legal framework allows them to draw a base-line with the minimum requisites for the model and the administrative scheme to follow (I.CN). To summarize: a) recognition of the scheme does not represent direct control over the process which should remain grassroots; b) the regulatory framework should be normatively and administratively flexible and simple; c) PGS should remain with a sustainable development and empowering character; d) accompanying policies like market building and responsible consumerism are important (See figure 5).

2.3.3. Agroecology and PGS in practice. The case of RAA

This subsection will explore the experience of RAA as a network practicing agroecology and using PGS. As shown in the Brazilian case, it is important to have ongoing experiences with PGS in order to understand the dynamics of the process and systematize them to use the results during the policy making. These experiences are also important since they evolve altogether with the political process already functioning and affect and get affected by the evolution of the ideas surrounding agroecology and PGS.

Agroecology has been practiced in the south of Ecuador since the 1980s, with a variegated group of supporters like peasants, farmers, experts and NGOs.31 By 2000,

31 Although specially working in northern Ecuador, we want to mention here a leading figure in agroecology in the whole country: Francisco “Pacho” Gangotena, an anthropologist and rural economist who has practiced agroecology since 1983. He has been involved tightly in the peasant and agroecological movement.
organizations from this region started spreading agroecology within small-scale farms. According to Echarri (2012), during this initial period, and with the support of the German Kurt-Michael Baudach from Red Cántaro, some conceptual elements of the agroecological process were settled. The organizations jointed with public and private institutions founded in 2003 the RAA (Chauveau et al. 2010). The main aim of the network is supporting organizations of small-scale family farmers to produce agroecology and to trade food backed up with social guarantee (Echarri 2012).

Additionally, working with the Belgian NGO VECO, the RAA launched campaigns intended to build awareness to consumers regarding agroecological products (Chauveau et al. 2010, 13). By 2004, and supported by the RAA, it was created the Asociación de Productores del Austro (Association of Austral Producers) linked to a marked: the CREA. By 2005 a system of Local Guarantee was designed together with the correspondent norms, the “Basic Norms of Agroecological Production for an Internal System of Agroecological Commitment” which regulate their agroecological production. This set of norms was launched in 2006 and re-edited in 2009. These norms were based on IFOAM’s standard but attending to local features adopted after a public debate (Echarri 2012). According to Echarri the participatory system was chosen because:

In order to gain trading spaces, it is necessary to work on developing a guarantee between producers and consumers [...] [PGS] were adopted as an alternative to official and third party certification which were expensive and created dependence on external norms and procedures. [Further] PGS are no longer the ‘alternative’ but the proposal where the main actors are the producers, and the trust comes directly from consumers (2012, 2).

According to this quote, PGS were not merely seen as a response to TPC. It was explicit that value given to the development dimension of PGS, and its understanding as a mechanism for capacity building, learning, enhancing social cohesion, guarantee assurance and market access (I.CA; I.CN; I.KIT). This empowering dimension is shown in the language employed by Echarri, since PGS serve also to re-incorporate the direct participation of actors in production and trading. By 2008, and framed within the new constitution, the commitment

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33 Translated from spanish by the author: “para estar en los espacios de comercialización hay que trabajar una garantía entre los mismos productores y consumidores […] se optó por este mecanismo como alternativa a la certificación oficial y de tercera parte porque esta última implica costos elevados y crea dependencia a las normas y procedimientos externos […]SPG deja de ser la ‘alternativa’ e inicia a ser la propuesta en donde los protagonistas sean los productores y el reconocimiento venga de los consumidores” (2).

34 Cursive added by the author.
of the RAA starting group is renewed under the basis of three axes: agroecological production, local guarantee and local markets (14). According to Chauveau et al. (2010) the RAA reaches two provinces, six cities, 48 organizations, 457 producers and six markets. 60% of their producers are considered to be fully agroecological while the rest are in the process of transitioning. The distance between consumers and producers is reported as spanning 5 to 75 km. and their sales were about half million dollars in 2009 (46-47). The PGS of RAA develops in three phases: the appliance of the System of Agroecological Commitment, followed by the validation work accomplished by the Local Technical Committee, and finally by the submission of accreditation credentials in charge of the Territorial Guarantee Committee. The cost of certification with PGS is purported to be 10 USD per producer per year (Echarri 2012).

The process starts with a System of Agroecological Commitment. The farmers apply the agroecological norms, receive inspections and the information of the farm is registered in a data sheet by the “promoters”. The follow up and validation is carried out by the Local Technical Committee (LTC) which has representatives from institutions like NGOs, the municipality and the network. The promoters, who have to be accredited by the LTC, cannot be political actors, require social acceptance within the group, and be recognized as “exemplary” agroecological producers. The LTC writes down information that goes to the Territorial Guarantee Committee which emits a credential in the case of successful compliance, its renewal applies every two years (Echarri 2012; Heifer Ecuador 2014; Chauveau 2013). Through PGS the whole farms is certified, and not just a defined (usually exportable) product as with TPC. Nevertheless, what is of main importance here is the complexity of the social control system where the farmers review each other’s farms, and the additional and variegated nature of the LTC where public and private members check to guarantee an independent process.

As PGS are more related to the logic of empowerment, its role is much more promotional than punitive. Becoming agroecological producers is understood as a path instead of an arrival point (I.CA; I.CN). In this vein, transitions to agroecology are of main importance for the RAA. The time span estimated to complete the transition is three years. The RAA created a three stage system: initial, transitional, and agroecological. The latter two do not use any kind of industrial input and are allowed to trade their products in markets related to the network (Echarri 2012; Heifer Ecuador 2014). The credential represents that the farm has fully become agroecological. Following the logic presented before, RAA also tries to
consolidate the triangle that links producers, markets and consumers (See figure 4). The RAA expanded from having one market in 2004 to six by 2010.

As shown, PGS goes beyond assessing outcomes. PGS works in the sustainable development and empowering dimension of certification, as a tool to contribute to Food Sovereignty. Despite this, policies still show a tendency towards benefiting large scale agriculture. On the one hand, between 2006-2010 most of the funds devoted to agriculture went to: “irrigation (44.9%), managerial tasks (7,7%), agricultural development (10,7%) and technical services (20%).” Meanwhile, the policies beneficial to peasants like land tenure, agrarian reform, subsidies and productive loans, etc. received just a 3.5% of the agricultural budget (Carrion and Herrera 2012, 62). This distribution of resources does not reflect the relevance of small-scale farming within the country.

This occurs despite a favorable and progressive legal framework that supports small-scale agriculture, agroecological practices, and has programs aimed to reencounter consumers with producers. RAA has developed an effective mechanism that includes transitions to agroecology that stimulate the scaling up of agroecology, developing markets, and is involved in building up responsible consumers. The corner stone of PGS are agroecological practices, but although they are benefited by PGS, agroecology requires a much more comprehensive approach linked to the traditional agrarian concerns like land, water and resources reforms. It means that food sovereignty as a whole should be strengthened (See figure 5).
Regulation starts
Agroecology tacitly
regulated, and required of
certification to sell as
organic

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<td>(organic, agroecological, ecological and biological as synonyms)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Foundation of RAA</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>MAELA-IFOAM meeting</td>
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<td>(International &quot;launch&quot; of PGS)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- PROBIO Interchange with Brazil</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>RAA system of Local Guarantee</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Ministerial Provision 302</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(agroecology is pulled out as synonyms)</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Rafael Correa in power (2007 - )</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>- New constitutional framework</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>LORSA</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>- Executive decree 1449 (PGS requires independent regulation)</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>Figure 5 Development of PGS in Ecuador</td>
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Figure 5 Development of PGS in Ecuador
2.4. Research propositions

In this section we will evaluate our research propositions. The first proposition corresponds to our first sub-question: to what extent is TPC dominant relative to other forms of certification of agricultural practices? The following propositions correspond to our second and third sub-questions: how ideas regarding PGS diffused, reaching Latin America, and particularly Ecuador? And, why were these schemes -PGS- chosen and adopted? This analysis will assist us in understanding the process carried out in view of our empirical findings, as well as to shed additional light on our main research question: how has PGS developed in Ecuador? Although these propositions follow a temporary logic, the results show that they may occur in a less fixed manner. For instance, participatory assessment of production –with e.g. ICS- (Proposition 3), might well have occurred before regulation to the organic sector was established (Proposition 1).

**Proposition one.** Given the widespread legitimation and adoption of TPC, it creates a Path Dependency that excludes divergent approaches to certification.

The analysis supports the idea that TPC dominates largely as a mechanism to assess quality at the international level, creating a Path Dependency. TPC becomes mandatory to gain organic certification, and consequently to get access to exporting markets. This dynamic was initiated by the EU who, in 1991, required TPC. It was followed by the U.S. and Japan. The first result is that those producers who have no access to TPC are unable to get access to organic markets. Additionally, the production system tends to be modified to comply with the requirements of the norm. Further, previously existent participatory schemes of certification are not recognized. However, our analysis suggests that TPC, when embedded in legal bodies that regulate organics in countries that were practicing agroecology or similar methods, can trigger contestation on this approach. This was shown in the cases of Brazil and Ecuador. This occurs due to previously control-free activities became the subject of regulation, and already existing participatory quality assessments are nullified. This situation, summed up with other facts (like long-standing peasant and farmers’ demands), ignites the process towards gaining recognition of PGS. These schemes are centered at the domestic level.
Proposition Two: *As TPC, due to its inner characteristics, excludes specially small-farmers, they look for alternatives and develop strategies to cope this block out.*

The results show that a restrictive price, and technical and administrative requirements precludes small-scale farmers from using TPC. As indicated, TPC seems to be much more suited for farms with more financial, technical and administrative muscle. This scenario opens up the space to look for alternatives, and PGS arise as an interesting option to consider. However, PGS are not merely a certification scheme, but a sustainable development tool. Now, the motives for adopting PGS are not necessarily a reaction to the impossibility of using TPC. According to the data analyzed, some ideas came out as driving this choice. Farmers get many advantages as members of PGS. They may become certified agroecological producers and build trust between themselves and their customers. They may be able to gain technical and administrative accompaniment in agroecology, and then finally they gain access to markets. Consequently, farmers through embracing PGS, reap much more than solely the certification of their production.

Proposition three: *Ideas about PGS spread internationally through a variety of actors (chiefly NGOs), and are actively selected as a scheme much better suited to the realities, thoughts, and practices of small-scale farmers than what TPC are.*

The data support the idea that previous Internal Control Systems were used in Ecuador, but during 2004 producers were criticized as being judge and jury in the process. Although this was not a peasant-driven entrepreneurship, it was supported especially by national and international NGOs. National organizations enriched their experiences in light of the Brazilian and Costa Rican knowledge. The adoption of PGS as an international norm remained “Ecuadorian” as it was adapted to the national context, considering already existing productive and organizational structures in the country. TPC corresponds much more to the logic of control, which is less suited for small-scale farming, while PGS are more related to the logic of empowerment that is better suited for agroecology. Consequently, we can say that the norm was actively adopted and localized as indicated by Acharya (2004).

Proposition four: *PGS are chosen and stimulated due to their help in building congruence between the current agricultural policies in Ecuador, and the actual productive system of the country.*

The analysis indicates that PGS, indeed, serve to build congruence between existing progressive laws in small-scale farming and actual practices. However, it is worth noting that most of the already existing legal frameworks e.g. the Constitution or the LORSA, had a
meaningful input from the indigenous and peasant organizations. In this regard, PGS are not selected as an “external” tool intended to build domestic congruence. Instead, they are selected having in mind the same principles under which the laws were made. This means the principles of Food Sovereignty. PGS, then, constitute a point in a continuum that is preceded and followed by the work of social and peasant organizations triggering small-scale family farming.

2.5. Contrasting the Ecuadorian and Brazilian Experiences

As indicated at the end of the section devoted to the Brazilian experience, we will build on a four-phase process that gives account of the process towards institutionalizing PGS. Although both processes have different trajectories in time and space, it is worth noting some points of convergence. Both a reflection on the process will be deployed, as well as a reference to the results obtained from the analysis of our propositions. These phases do not represent fixed moments, but the three first stages intertwine continuously.

Organizational.

Both countries have long-standing experience with sustainable agriculture and with social mobilization linked to agrarian issues. Brazil traces its experience to the 1970s. In the case of Ecuador, this path can be traced to the 1980s. Peasant organizations have been deemed important in developing alternative agricultural practices more suited to their social and environmental conditions. In both cases, the rise of agroecology had this deep social basis that emphasized small-scale family farming. Thus, the role of PGS as congruence-builder (as a tool to link the legal framework with actual practices) is fundamental, as it considers the capacity producers have to organize networks, to run PGS and to build links with consumers through markets (Proposition 2, 4). Accordingly, Ecovida and RAA correspond to ongoing experiences of organized farmers betting for alternative models of agriculture. They build capacity among its members to lead process of agroecological transitions. However, the Ecuadorian case has the particularity of enhancing PGS parallel to market and consumer building. Direct experiences with agroecology and PGS at the grassroots level are a cornerstone in building a coherent work towards institutionalizing PGS.

Participative.

Participation is core in the making of PGS. In both cases, the discussions on PGS initiated once organics started to be regulated nationally, requiring certification to be traded (Proposition 1). The Brazilian experience had at least two moments of large participation:
one in 1994 regarding organic regulation, and again in 2002 to discuss reforms to NI 06/22. 
In the latter case, the OAG led the discussions. The input of already functioning agricultural 
networks like Ecovida, was of most significant importance. Ecuador also had several 
moments of participation. The demands of peasant and indigenous groups had resonance in 
the constitution of 2008 and the LORSA of 2009. Additionally, the agroecological movement 
managed to change Ministerial Provision 177 by Ministerial Provision 302 with the effects 
of setting agroecology apart from the regulatory framework for organics. Since then the 
movement has worked in close dialogue with AGROCALIDAD. Ongoing agroecological 
processes as those of the RAA or PROBIO are pivotal in the process. In both experiences, 
it is interesting to note that participation is centered on endowing PGS with enough flexibility 
and empowerment rather than control logic. In this way, producers gain much more than 
just the certification, but the full benefits of being part of a PGS (Proposition 2).

**Advocacy.**

Both cases have commonalities and differences in their advocacy trajectory. In the case 
of Brazil, the problem was a rigid regulatory framework related to organic production 
(Proposition 1). Farmers wanted voluntary and flexible schemes. The struggle continued in 
the form of demanding other kind of certification than TPC due to the fact that it was not 
suited for all kinds of agriculture, particularly small-scale organic (Proposition 3). The 
Ecuadorian case shares with Brazil the common basis of opposing a regulatory body that did 
not consider the particularities of small-scale farming (Propositions 2, 3). The advocacy in 
Ecuador attempted to extract agroecology out of being regulated by a law that considered 
agroecological, organic, biological and ecological production as synonyms (Propositions 1,3). 
The situation in Brazil was, and the proposal in Ecuador is to build up PGS as a mechanism 
that accomplishes the assessment task but considering small-scale family farming and linked 
to a social or sustainable development core.

In both cases there was the underlying task of adjusting these schemes to the ecological, 
social, cultural and economic realities of small-scale farmers (Proposition 3). The continuing 
agroecological work with Ecovida in Brazil and RAA in Ecuador served to advocate on the 
basis of systematized practices, and to gain legitimacy in the discussions on the legal proposal. 
Ecuador received norm influx from Brazil and Costa Rica, who at that time had advances 
towards institutionalizing PGS (Proposition 3). Something interesting regarding Ecuador is 
the joint advocacy for markets and responsible consumerism along with PGS. Additionally, 
the Ecuadorian experience is embedded in the framework of Food Sovereignty, with the
specific weight that it provides to agroecology and small-scale family farming (Proposition 4). In both cases the attempt was, and is, to institutionalize PGS but maintaining its flexibility and independence.

Consolidation.

The ending point, after working on gaining organizational capacity and starting advocacy, is to endow upcoming legal bodies with normative and administrative flexibility, grassroots basis, and an empowering rather than control logic. This is done with the aim of corresponding with the specificity of small-scale farming and agroecological production that is supported by law (Propositions 3, 4). In both cases the development and promotion dimension of PGS are central, however, while in the Brazilian case organic is the key word, and in the Ecuadorian case the word is agroecology. In both cases progressive governments opened the door for dialogue and participatory involvement in the discussion of these legal bodies. However, as indicated by some of our interviewees, there should not be a rush in the process of institutionalizing due to the fact that it might imply losing control of the process and/or embedding PGS in the law with unfavorable conditions (I.KIT; I.CA).
Conclusion

The current division between productive approaches, agroindustry and agroecology, brings about the issue of how to address the social, economic and environmental implications of their operations. Standards and certification are private instruments of food governance that are intended to undertake that task (Fuchs et al. 2011). Although they are considered to be mild responses, they might also have profound consequences as aforementioned with the case of PGS. These mechanisms are used for a variety of purposes such as assessing administrative processes, labor conditions or quality of products (Hatanaka 2005). In the latter case TPC is broadly used, especially for exports, to indicate compliance with organic standards (Gómez Tovar et al. 2005). However, due to the high cost and rigidity of TPC, small-scale farmers face the impossibility of using them to assess their production. This study examines PGS as an alternative to TPC. Thus, this research attempts to answer the following question: how have PGS developed in Ecuador?

To answer this question we have used the results obtained from the analysis of our research propositions. The propositions served to contrast our expectations regarding mechanisms (such as path dependency), processes (such as norm diffusion) and reasons for adoption of PGS against the empirical findings. We also have to consider that the comparative nature of this study helped us to understand the Ecuadorian process in face of the experience of Brazil, which achieved institutionalization of PGS.

Aligned with worldwide interest, agroecology has been practiced in Ecuador since the 1980s. In 2003, Ministerial Provision 177 was enacted. It established regulations for organic, agroecological, ecological and biological production, treating them as synonyms. The consequence was that a previously non-regulated field became subject of regulation, and certification started to be required to trade products as organic. This result supports the idea that TPC created a legacy that resulted in this scheme embedding the regulation on organics. Consequently, other systems than TPC were officially not recognized (Proposition 1).

By 2004, representatives of CBs criticized agroecological producers. Their argument was that ICS were not trustworthy since producers become judge and jury during the assessment. As a result PROBIO, a networker of biological producers, contacted Red Ecovida from Brazil, and learned of their experience using PGS (Proposition 3). The data supports the idea that PGS became a scheme better suited to the social, economic and environmental conditions of small-scale farms. PGS maintain an empowering logic, sustainable development dimensions and also a process oriented assessment which is much more
beneficial for farmers (Proposition 2). These facts support the idea of norm diffusion through localization, as suggested by Acharya (2004) (Proposition 3). Additionally, we found that the Chart of Torres, launched during the IFOAM/MAELA meeting in 2004, was an international event that leveraged and contributed to the diffusion of PGS. In 2006 Ministerial Provision 302 pulled agroecology out as a synonym with organic. This change was a result of the pressure exercised by the agroecological movement.

By 2007 President Rafael Correa came into power, opening up a political opportunity by convening a national assembly to reform the constitution. The new constitution of 2008, and the LORSA of 2009, recognized the long-standing struggle of indigenous and peasant movements. These laws established the relevance of small-scale farming for Ecuador and framed it within the concept of food sovereignty. By 2011 Executive Decree 1449, which dealt with the regulation of organics, established that PGS will require an independent regulatory framework. These findings suggest that PGS are established to build congruence between a legal framework supportive of small-scale farming, and the instruments needed to link it with existing practices (Proposition 4). Additionally, the analysis reveals that COPISA, the body in charge of providing supportive advice to enhance food sovereignty, also launched supplementary legal proposals on agrobiodiversity in 2012, and on responsible consumerism in 2013.

There are several features of the Ecuadorian experience with PGS that can be drawn from the work conducted. They have to do with the role of the legal structure, the role of participation, the encompassing strategy, and the features of the norm. Framing PGS within the principles of Food Sovereignty established in the law legitimizes the demands of the agroecological movement, especially because their task with PGS is contributing to the applicability of the law. Additionally, the current achievements on PGS cannot be delinked from the traditional demands of the indigenous movement. A significant characteristic of the Ecuadorian experience with PGS is its encompassing strategy. It means the parallel moves aimed to: a) strengthen social and productive organizations, b) work towards gaining a beneficial recognition of PGS, and c) develop and strength strategies to build markets and consumers. The whole strategy corresponds to an understanding of PGS as a congruence builder, instead of just a mechanism of control. The main aim of PGS is to encourage agroecology by enhancing production, markets and consumption.
Implications for the literature.

It is also possible to reflect on some implications of our findings relative to the theory. According to our expectations, path dependency had a relevant role in three main dimensions: dominance, reinforcement and block out (Pierson 2000). First, it had a role in establishing TPC as a largely dominant approach to conformity assessment. Second, TPC reinforces itself through audit chaining, and embeddedness in legal bodies. Third, it also blocked out alternative paths like PGS, which lack recognition to trade internationally. However, although path dependency cannot explain how change occurs (Greener 2005), it can give glimpses on what is required to change and why. As our analysis suggest, mandatory certification required by organic regulations created contestation, and the necessity to think about alternative certification schemes adapted to small-scale farming. Path dependency is also criticized by its structural rigidity and disregard toward the role of ideas to produce change (Greener 2005). This might be considered cautiously, since in this study we have shown that ideas (about PGS) indeed ignited change. Ideas had a role in bringing back participatory assessment as recognized ways of assessing production, which was common practice at the beginning of the organic movement.

Additionally, we found that, as expected, norm diffusion also had a role in establishing PGS in Ecuador. The pressure for quality assessment has triggered the necessity to build schemes suited to the features of different kinds of producers. In this way, the data indicates that PGS are progressively being considered as an alternative way of certification especially suited for small-scale farmers. PGS gained leverage in 2004 thanks to the MAELA/IFOAM meeting in Brazil. Thus, we can consider PGS as an emerging norm for conformity assessment against agroecological principles. Our analysis shows that national NGOs were main actors in localizing ideas on PGS, brought mainly from Brazil and Costa Rica. This last point is relevant since the role of “insider proponents” are emphasized in Acharya’s work (2004). Besides, localization occurs because of some points. First, PGS complement, not replace, already existing ideas, in this case Food Sovereignty. Second, PGS might bring more benefits than competitor schemes e.g. their empowering dimension, their flexibility relative to the conditions of small-scale farmers, and their congruence-building capacity (Proposition 4). In this sense, the schemes were actively chosen. This point fits with Acharya’s statement that “while adaptation may be tactical and to some extent forced on the target audience, localization is voluntary” (2004, 251).


**Contribution.**

Overall, we have three points to highlight regarding the outcomes of this research. Firstly, this work aimed at understanding alternative schemes of certification, fundamentally PGS. Most of the available academic research focuses on TPC, but in many cases these schemes are not suited to the conditions of small-scale farming. In this vein, we wanted to understand the alternatives intended to address this limitation. Ecuador is a country where agriculture constitutes a main source of employment, and where most of the production for domestic consumption comes from small-scale farms (Carrion 2012). So, we traced the evolution of PGS in Ecuador.

Secondly, this research outlines some features of the process towards institutionalizing PGS. The cases of Brazil and Ecuador were contrasted, and we identified common steps in the process. Further, we identified some key elements about PGS that need to be considered in the process of institutionalization. Some of them are: to systematize already existing agroecological experiences, avoid making PGS mechanism of control but of empowerment, endow with flexibility to the scheme, and maintain its grassroots operations. In addition, we identified that an encompassing strategy can be important in the development of PGS, since it links markets and consumers as elements that work altogether with PGS to enhance agroecology.

Thirdly, we have shown the role that path dependency, as portrayed by Pierson (2000), had in the process of understanding and adopting PGS. We also shed light on the way that ideas spread, and in how Acharya’s norm localization occurs. Finally, the results of this research can be generalized in a few ways. First, based on the comparative analysis carried out, it is possible to trace other countries’ evolutionary path with PGS relative to the phases studied here. Second, the results might be generalized to other countries within economically developing countries, more specifically to Latin American countries which might have similar conditions to Ecuador. In this sense, it is possible that the same patterns e.g. of norm diffusion might occur in other countries.

**Shortcomings.**

This research has been conducted as thoroughly as possible within the limits of time, space, and scope that we had faced. However, it is important to reflect on some of its shortcomings. Firstly, it is noticeable that this work centered on the evolution of legal provisions across time. Although they are important, as they show us settled decisions, the
unavailability of policy documents and original contributions on the topic precluded us from being more plural in our analysis. Secondly, time and space constraints prevented us from expanding the number of interviews conducted. We were also unable to establish contact with a representative of RAA, which would have enriched our understanding of the development and role of the network in regards to PGS in Ecuador. In addition, most of our interviewees had job positions more or less linked to sustainability, which may have affected their judgment of TPC and PGS. A more variegated account of interviewees, including individuals from the large organic sector, or from the agroindustry, would have nuanced our work. Finally, a direct “on the ground” exploration of certifications conducted with TPC and PGS would have provided a better grasp of the issue.

**Suggestion for future research.**

We have also identified some areas that might require further research. First, as networks of producers who conduct PGS are usually financially supported by public and/or private organizations, their assessment of the costs involved in certification and follow up might be inaccurate. In other words, certification might be subsidized by these organizations. Accordingly, research could be conducted on the real cost of certifying with PGS. Second, our results seem to point to rational choice motivations for adoption of PGS. Nonetheless, further research could be done on the communitarian dimension of agriculture in the Andes, and to the organizational enterprise that PGS represent. This would enable us to understand PGS in view of a more collectivist framework. Third, norm diffusion requires further research, since there still exist the possibility that a learning process and coevolution of PGS might have occurred between Brazil and Ecuador. Finally, it would be interesting to explore the possibilities of PGS as a multidimensional certification scheme. Although the trend with standards and certification is to assess particular qualities like organic or fair trade, the possibilities PGS have to become a certification for e.g. agrobiodiversity conservation, fair trade and organic, should be considered. This might constitute and advancement in terms of optimizing the assessment capacity that PGS might have. Thus, the opportunities presented by this certification scheme will require further research.

**Policy implications.**

Drawing on our research, it is possible to comment on some policy aspects. First, it might be interesting to make an in-depth study of the certification strategy used in Brazil. Both TPC and PGS are used in Brazil at different levels, and for different purposes. Thus, they do not become competing frameworks. Exports, for instance, are sometimes important for
small-scale farmers who produce e.g. cocoa, coffee or quinoa. Creating the adequate mechanism for them to export, via double certification, might be important. Consequently, the necessary framework for a complementary coexistence of both systems should be examined, however maintaining consistency with a vision of empowerment and sustainable development.

Additionally, the empowering character of certification through PGS, as indicated by Auld et al. (2014), is confronted with the dilemma of not undermining its participatory character while acquiring more consistency and control. Although the independence required by PGS should be enhanced, the mechanism for controlling should also be subject of analysis and reflection. It means that flexibility and independence should not diminish the control needed to assure that agroecology is carried out in the proper way, and that products have the quality features expected. Just as control by itself might preclude people to sum up to certification, only considering the empowering dimension of PGS might endanger accomplishment with agroecological quality. Then, this thin line should be overseeing in the process of institutionalizing PGS and its subsequent follow up.
References


### Appendix 1

**Interviews:**

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<td>Stephen Sherwood</td>
<td>Lecturer and research fellow at the University of Wageningen, the Netherlands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I.KIT</td>
<td>Rhiannon Pyburn</td>
<td>Senior Advisor at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), the Netherlands.</td>
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<td>I.CA</td>
<td>Roberto Gortaire</td>
<td>Coordinator of Colectivo Agroecológico, Ecuador.</td>
<td>April 30, 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>I.CN</td>
<td>Cecilia Ponce</td>
<td>Coordinator of the Department on Commercial Networks at the MAGAP, Ecuador.</td>
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